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By Hebe Elsna

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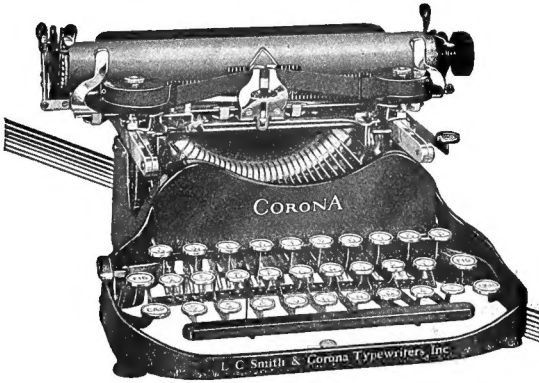


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# ALL-STORY

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*She rounded the corner and bumped smack into a man!*

# Gallant Girl

*Superstition meant something in Ann's young life. That morning she got out of bed on the wrong side*

By Jane Littell

ANN CORNWALL believed in hunches and inspirations. She had never met Blaine Hastings, had never even seen him, to her knowledge; but she had a hunch that at some time, in some place, he was going to mean something in her young life.

His name intrigued her. Blaine Hastings! It seemed to Ann that she would just about die of curiosity if she didn't meet him.

She was always hearing his name bandied about, but she got very little definite information about him—and that is odd in Hollywood, where "a good dish of dirt" is always passed around so generously.

He was not connected with the pictures, but still he trailed with the studio crowd. He had built himself a unique house, Ann had heard, though she never could learn where it was; and he lived there alone, except for one Chinese house boy, when he was in Hollywood. He would disappear for months at a time, and then pop up again, as casual as usual, with no explanations.

If he had any business or profession, no one knew about it. He was just a play boy about town, well liked by those who knew him, and his very reticence about his own affairs made him a fascinating mystery.

Only last night Ann had heard that he was back in town, and she had gone to sleep filled with the conviction that this hunch of hers about meeting him was going to have results in the very near future.

The raucous summons of the telephone bell disturbed her dreams—and they were very pleasant dreams, too.

Even in her sleep, Ann Cornwall could tell the difference between the shrilling of the alarm clock and the summons of the telephone bell. The latter, at that hour of the morning, meant a hurry call to the studio.

THIS particular morning, Ann scrambled out of bed with her eyes shut and tore to the telephone.

"Ann, can you shoot?"

"Shoot?" she questioned, not entirely awake.

"Yeah — revolver," came the crisp voice of the Five Arts Film Company's casting director.

"Oh, sure!" replied Ann, who would agree to quiet a raging sea if a director asked her to. "All you do is shut your eyes and pull the trigger."

"Not in this horse opera you don't," assured the voice. "You shoot a couple of nice, neat initials in a door."

"Do I?" said Ann. "When?"

"In three days. Trot out to the studio, and I'll give you a pass to the target range. And get going, sister! The time is short, and you've got to be good. It's a nice part."

"O. K., chief," said Ann. "I'm always good, aren't I?"

One always claims to be, anyway, in Hollywood, and one leaves no stone unturned to prove it.

Ann put down the telephone and blew the curls out of her eyes with a sort of comical resignation.

"Ann, you couldn't put a bullet through a barn, much less a door," she said aloud with real ruefulness; "but you sure need that pay check, old girl. Well, you've always wangled somehow. The perforated initials you deliver may be a bit wabbly and uncertain, but you'll deliver 'em!"

And then the amused, rueful tone changed to something very much like terror.

"Wow!" she cried. "You got out of bed on the wrong side!"

She stood there, her hands on her pyjama-clad hips, her green eyes wide with consternation, surveying the havoc she had wrought when she scrambled out of that nest of blankets to answer the raucous demands of the telephone.

Her usually neat bed (it came down out of the wall, and she always slept on one side and left the other carefully tucked in, because it took so much less time and effort to smooth up half a bed) looked as if a whole troop of Singer's midgets had slept in it, and had had a restless night, at that. She had scrambled out on the wrong side—the side nearest the telephone.

It was just as ominous, to Ann, to get out of bed on the wrong side as it would be to enter a house by one door and leave it by another, or to have a visitor put a hat on a bed. You can't work in the studios without picking up a bizarre assortment of theatrical and studio superstitions; and Ann hadn't had such awfully good luck lately.

"I'll bet you shoot yourself before the day's over," she worried. "I'll bet the flivver dies a sudden death, or you meet Blaine Hastings and he won't give you a tumble, or somebody else beats you to this job, or—"

But she couldn't think of any worse things that could happen—which just goes to show that it does not pay to forecast disaster, since fate is so well equipped with surprises.

IT turned out to be just the sort of a day Ann expected. The flivver coughed and sputtered, and progressed in a series of jerks and leaps. No wonder Ann had named her rust-bitten little car the Goat. The Goat usually got its owner to her destination, but that was the most you could say in its favor. Still, Ann loved it because it was her very own.

The property man at the studio provided her with an old-fashioned revolver that looked like a rifle. She had to wait and wait in the casting office for a permit to use the police range, and when she got there she had to wait until the newest class of rookie policemen finished with their target practice. Then her paper target wouldn't stay put on account of the wind, and the revolver had a kick like an army mule. It was "one of those days," all right!

Finally, in desperation, she went back to the studio. She persuaded the director that even a woman bandit wouldn't use that sort of a gun.

"She'd use a cute little gun," said Ann craftily.

"That's what Blaine Hastings just said," admitted the director.

"Blaine Hastings!" ejaculated Ann.

"Yes, he dropped in here for a minute. Just left."

"And I missed him by five minutes, I suppose!" groaned Ann.

Still, she consoled herself, their trails were coming closer together. If she only missed him by five minutes this time, she might run smack into him any day.

With a new supply of ammunition and targets, and with a little blunt-nosed revolver in the pocket of her leather coat, Ann set out again for the target range. Her practice went much better this time, and she stuck to it until the light began to fail.

She had almost forgotten the omen of the morning as she drove over the hills through the twilight, back toward Hollywood. She had a job, and her part was a nice one. It would keep her working three or four weeks. It had come along just when the bank was saying it in red, too.

And Blaine Hastings was back in town. Their paths were converging. She had missed him by only five minutes to-day! She was smiling with anticipation as the Goat purred along in the cool evening air. The dusk was gorgeous with purple tints.

Then, on a narrow one-way road high up in the lonely hills, the omen asserted itself again.

The Goat choked and sputtered—and died; and no amount of jiggling gadgets would start it again!

Ann sat there for a moment, almost ready to cry. It had been such an exasperating day! Then she began to whistle furiously, like a small boy bolstering up his courage in the dark.

Out of a pocket in the car she took a flash light. Up went the hood of the car—but everything looked all right to Ann's experienced eyes. Finally it occurred to her to investigate the gas tank. Empty! And she was up in the hills about three miles above the main road!

There was only one thing to do. Walk! And that rocky road would just about ruin her kid slippers. There was small likelihood that a car would come up that narrow, one-way road after dark. Some houses were sprinkled about the cañons, occupied by hermits and recluses, but who wants to meet a hermit in the dark?

If a car had come along, Ann would have been too terrified to stop it. She wasn't sufficiently accustomed to revolvers to feel entirely safe even with one in her pocket.

So, whistling to keep her courage up as she went, flash light in one hand because there might be snakes in the road, and the other hand cuddling the revolver in her coat pocket, Ann set out toward the lights of Hollywood.

But the exercise took all her breath, and as her eyes soon accustomed themselves to the star-lit night, presently she was trudging silently along, flash light in one pocket, revolver in the other, smiling ruefully at the idiotic things that always managed to happen to her. And then—

Ann rounded a sharp corner, made the sharper by an overhanging rock, and bumped smack into a man!

In the shock of contact she lost all her breath. Entirely without conscious volition, her hands came jerking out of her pockets, the flash light dark in one, the revolver silent in the other. Both of them banged against the man.

The man was as startled as she was. Who wouldn't be to have a revolver smack him across the face? But he had more presence of mind than had Ann. His hands traveled swiftly over her leather coat, and caught her wrists in a grip of steel. The next instant she screamed at the stinging pain that tore at her face. The man—whether intentionally or not she could not tell—had dragged the sights of the revolver down across her forehead and across the corner of her right eye!

A moment later she was tasting blood!

"A girl!" came the man's astonished voice, on the trail of her scream. "What the devil—"

"What the devil yourself!" cried the girl out of her pain and terror. "You've hurt my face! I'm bleeding—"

The man forced the gun from her limp fingers, slid his other hand over hers and appropriated the flash light. The next moment he had turned the light on her face.

"Good Lord!" he cried, aghast at what the light disclosed. "There's a house—"

"What's happened to my eye?" gasped Ann. "I'm afraid to touch it. I can't afford to be all scarred up," she cried hysterically.

"Keep your hands away from your face," ordered the stranger, catching both her hands in his to enforce his order. "There's a house back there a couple of hundred feet. It's dark. We will have to break in—but we've got to stop that bleeding."

As calmly as that! Even in her pain Ann felt a flash of admiration for the man who could meet such an emergency with such competency. He had her firmly by the arm; did he think she might faint, she wondered? Or was her face in worse shape than she imagined?

She was shaking with suppressed sobs, and the tears that could not be controlled stung and smarted unbearably. What had happened to her eye? Just when she had a job!

Oh, would her rotten luck never leave her? Would she be able to cover the wound with make-up and go on with the picture? That job was the most important thing in the world at the moment. She could make up over a scar—just a plain scar—but what could she do about an open wound?

ANN CORNWALL was frantic. But she had met enough emergencies to know that hysterics wouldn't help any. She set her teeth firmly together to keep them from chattering and permitted the man to march her down the road.

But her mind was racing. She was completely at this man's mercy, and she was dependent upon him for help!

They reached a long flight of stone steps that led up to a rambling house built against the hillside.

"Can you make it? Or shall I carry you?" he asked.

An anxious voice. Really a nice voice, if Ann could tell anything about voices in the panic-filled darkness, without her eyes to corroborate.

"I can make it," she managed between clenched teeth.

"Hurt much?"

"Stings," gritted Ann. No use berating the man. It was as much her fault as his. She had slapped him in the face with a gun—

Somehow, Ann's fear of her companion abated a little as they climbed the steps. There was something assuring in his concern for her. He seated her on the porch steps and said:

"Give me one of your slippers, will you? This house is locked tight."

Ann's heart thudded suddenly with renewed fear. How did he know that? What was he? A burglar? What business had he wandering in the hills in the darkness?

"What—do you—want my slipper for?" she managed. She never could negotiate that rough rocky road in her stockinged foot—

"To break a window with, my dear," answered the man, laughter in his tone. Ann was almost sure it was laughter. "We sound like the Three Brown Bears... Don't you know that a woman's slipper makes a grand hammer? You can crack a panel out of a solid wooden door with it—in case you are ever locked in. And as for a window—"

In case you are ever locked in! Those words rattled around in the girl's mind for a moment. What did he mean? He meant something. Was he just reassuring her? The quick, deep breath that fortified her wavering courage sounded almost like a sob to the man.

"But—it's a crime—"

"Well, I'm committing it, not you," he told her a bit gruffly. "I can't imagine committing a crime in a better cause."

When she didn't make a move to offer him the slipper, he turned the flash light on her feet. Then he bent down and calmly stripped off one of her high-heeled pumps.

"A gun and a flash light—and three-inch heels!" he chortled. "Oh, you women!"

Ann's sudden flash of indignation wiped out her fears and steadied her.

But the man wasted no time in badinage. The flash light was turned upon a window, the slipper heel began at one corner and neatly crashed that pane of glass to bits. The next instant the

house was illuminated and the door was opened for Ann.

The amazing man even turned on the porch light from just inside the door, and stood there for a moment, as if he were giving Ann a chance to look him over. And he did it so casually that Ann knew it had been deliberate. He was trying to reassure her.

*Her heart did a flip-flop as she saw the envelope in the same place*

REALLY, there was nothing in his appearance to be afraid of. He had red hair and brown eyes, with laughing lines at the corners. He wore plus fours, with an expensive camel's hair sweater and matching hose—all showing signs of wear, but all originally well chosen. He was hatless.

For a bare instant he permitted her inspection. Then he replaced her slipper.

"Now for the first aid," he said competently. "You *are* a mess! Whew! I'm afraid, my girl, that you're going to have a beautiful shiner. And nobody will believe you when you

tell 'em you walked into a door. They never do."

He lifted her to her feet.

"A shiner? You mean a black eye?" came Ann's voice, quavering in spite of her effort at control. "Oh, *please* don't let me have a black eye!"

A black eye meant that she would lose the picture. She might be able to cover the bruised flesh with make-up—although she doubted it—but the eye itself—

"The awfulest, most outrageous things happen to me!" she wailed. "This is—just—the last—straw!"

And she collapsed on a divan.

Almost before she knew it, the man was beside her with hot water and antiseptics and bandages, and the painful business of first aid kept Ann's hands clenched into tight little fists and her teeth gritted together.

When it was over she shut her eyes and relaxed. And then the odor of a very rich, rare old brandy assailed her nostrils. She opened her eyes to see a small glass being held out to her.

"A sip of this won't hurt you," said the man.

Ann's eyes questioned him. She was wondering how he knew so well where to find everything, but that was not what he understood by her hesitancy.

"No knock-out drops in it, sister. Just plain, pre-war brandy. You need it."

Ann sipped it. She had to with those brown eyes of his upon her. And she felt better immediately.

"Now," said the man. "I'll go scouting for a car and take you home. You don't need any stitches, but you'd better let a doctor dress that wound tomorrow."

No apologies. No questions. Just bare acceptance of a situation that neither of them had brought about voluntarily, but which had to be met just the same.

Very shortly thereafter she heard the sound of a car. The man must have broken into the garage, too! And the law would never take his motives into consideration. He had made himself twice a criminal—and all for her sake!

Ann jumped to her feet—and swayed dizzily. She wanted to go and tell him that her own flivver was up in the hills and all it needed was gasoline. Surely the owner of the house would not mind if they borrowed a gallon of gas, and he might resent very much the borrowing of his car. But before she could subdue that dizziness and carry out her plan, the man was back.

"Ready, eh?" he said when he found her standing in the center of the room. "Good. Let's go. The sooner you get to bed the better."

"But—you'll get into trouble for this," she worried. "Breaking and entering—"

"My affair entirely," he assured her. "I think maybe I'd better carry you down those steps. You look sort of gaga to me."

She felt "gaga." She took a couple of steps, and was glad enough when he swept her up into his strong arms and carried her down the long flight of stone steps.

All the way down through the hills silence reigned between them. Ann, who had never fainted in her life, discovered what it feels like to fight for consciousness. She lay back against the seat relaxed, almost praying not to faint.

She was exhausted by the trials of the day, and its alarming climax—so exhausted that she knew a sort of

dumb resignation to the fate that had overtaken her. There was nothing she could do about it, so she tried to turn her thoughts away from the loss of that badly needed picture. She tried thinking about the man, and she decided that never in her whole life had a man piqued her curiosity to the extent that this one did — this stranger who was probably a burglar!

"Where am I to take you?" he asked suddenly.

Ann hesitated. Should she get out at the corner and try to walk up the street to her apartment? But then, why shouldn't she let him take her to her door? It was a big apartment house.

She told him.

"Better take your coat off before you go in," he advised. "It's pretty gory."

He helped her to the sidewalk and removed the coat for her, folding it so that the lining was outside.

"Now, take my arm and I'll take you to your door."

Ann obeyed that, too. She didn't know just why, either.

When he had unlocked her apartment door for her, and reached inside and snapped on the lights, he asked, with a touch of anxiety in his tone:

"Think you'll be all right now if I leave you?"

"I think so," Ann said, a little unsteadily. "And—thank you very much."

The man laughed softly, and his hand slid down her arm and caught her fingers.

"For giving you a gun brand?" he asked. "May I kiss the hand of the most gallant lady I have ever met?"

Without waiting for permission, he bent and his lips brushed her fingers. Then he laid the ruined leather coat over her arm and turned away, without another word!

ANN CORNWALL just stood there, clinging to the door jamb, and watched him until he reached the turn in the hall. She was furious because he had expressed no regret for what he had done to her. Maybe he thought it was all her fault. Maybe he thought she should apologize for causing him so much trouble.

And then she remembered his words—"the most gallant lady I have ever met." What did he mean by that?

But whatever he meant, that didn't put her into condition to go on with the picture. She went straight to a mirror and screamed at what she saw. Her blouse was blood from neck to waist! Her right eye was circled with a blue bruise, and the eye itself would have done credit to a prize fighter! Wow! What a sight! How long did it take an eye like that to get back to normal?

As she turned away from the mirror she saw her leather coat. Ruined! The soft kid was stiff with blood—and Ann knew very well what little success the cleaners had with leather coats. And it was her *only* warm coat!

What a horrible, horrible day! Suddenly Ann's sternly controlled nerves gave way, and she burst into tears.

Into the midst of her sobs came the shrilling of the telephone. She finally dragged herself to answer it. It was the night clerk.

"What happened to you, Miss Cornwall? Need a doctor or anything?"

The curiosity in his voice steadied her.

"No," she said. "I'm all right. A little accident, that's all."

"Well, the fellow who brought you

in stopped and asked me your name. I thought that was kinda funny."

Ann thought that over for a moment. What did he want to know her name for?

"Did you tell him?" she asked dubiously.

"Yeah. I thought I better. You might have sent him for a doctor or something. Was it all right?"

"Yes," returned Ann rather coolly. She hated that night clerk. He was an inquisitive blunderer.

Funny... Well, maybe he wanted to know how her eye healed up. Maybe he wasn't a burglar. Maybe... Maybe...

IT seemed only a minute after she had crawled wearily into bed before a prolonged knocking on the door awakened her. She didn't scramble out of bed this morning. She was too stiff and headachy.

But the knocking was very insistent, so she reached for a negligee and finally answered it. It was the day clerk, with a huge box. A florist's box!

There was only one person...and that was a ridiculous idea...a burglar sending her flowers...

She tore open the note that accompanied them. It read:

MOST GALLANT LADY:

I must make what amends I can. Please accept these as a tribute to your courage and gallantry. I salute you.

"Flowers!" sniffed Ann. "When what I need is groceries!"

But presently she was smiling mistily. It was romantic, anyway. Flowers—from a burglar! And such a gorgeous array of them. It took all the bowls and vases and even the water pitcher to hold them. When they were arranged, Ann went from bowl to vase, touching them, simply beaming with pleasure. Then she caught sight of her face in the mirror.

"You darned fool!" she snorted. "He's a burglar! You hear? A burglar! And you forgive him for scarring you for life just because he sent you a load of flowers!"

And presently—"He must be a very extraordinary burglar... I wonder whom he robbed to buy those flowers..."

At that moment another knocking began that made Ann's heart do an almost painful flip-flop. Maybe it was—her burglar! She called: "Wait a minute!" and then tore to her dressing room to run a comb through her hair and pat some powder on her nose!

Quite primly, but with a thudding heart, Ann opened the door—to face a complete stranger!

"Miss Cornwall?"

"Yes."

"I'm Dr. Blivens. I'll dress your wound—"

"Who sent you?" she demanded.

"A friend of yours, who paid for my visits in advance."

"Well—I'll—be—darned!"

"I don't think you'll have a bad scar," said the doctor, when the dressing had been changed. "But you will have a black eye for a week or so. I'll come again in the morning and change the dressing."

"But don't you know the name of the man who sent you?" asked Ann, surprisingly wistful.

"Don't you know?" the doctor returned with a trace of insinuating amusement.

"No," admitted Ann.

IT was still early when Ann stopped at a garage and arranged for a car to take her up into the hills to rescue the Goat. In spite of that persist-

nt throbbing in her head, in spite of he almost hopelessly discolored eye, Ann intended to try to save that job. If the director would only shoot her scenes a little later—

Up and up and up they drove; but when they reached the spot there was no rust bitten flivver standing in the middle of the road. They did pass a shiny new maroon colored roadster, just about where Ann expected the Goat to be waiting for her. Round and round they cruised, but no Goat was to be found.

"You don't s'pose somebody swiped the Goat and left you a shiny new car instead, do you?" kidded the garage man.

Ann's pink mouth flew open in surprise at the idea. After the flowers—and the doctor—well, wouldn't it be just like that red-headed burglar?

"Suppose we go back there and find out," she suggested in a breathless little voice.

They did. Folded up on the front seat of the shiny new car was an equally new leather coat—oh, a very grand leather coat—and sticking out of one of the pockets was a note addressed to Miss Ann Cornwall.

"Well — I'll — be—darned!" managed Ann, tearing open the note. She read with astonishment:

More amends, dear gallant lady. I want your flivver for a souvenir, and I really can't leave you with no means of transportation to carry on your nefarious business, can I?

I hope the coat fits. You felt like size sixteen in my arms when I carried you down the steps. If it doesn't, hang it on this bush beside the road and tell me the size that will fit.

I left your flash light in the left-hand pocket of the car, and transferred your driving license to the new one. But I'm keeping your revolver. You gave it up too easily to be trusted with it. The next night prowler you meet might shoot you with it. And I couldn't bear that!

And that was all! No signature. No mark of identity.

Ann read it twice and didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He called her a gallant lady in one breath, and kidded her about her incompetence in the next! He talked about her nefarious business—did he think *she* was a burglar? And he had the nerve to remind her that she had been in his arms!

A rosy blush swept over her at the remembrance. She had enjoyed those moments in his arms. She hadn't yet admitted it to herself, but she had lain there contentedly, comfortably, luxuriating in the warm strength of him, in being so competently taken care of. And now—now he was making fun of her.

Of course she had to tell the garage man the story.

"I'll say you're lucky," he commented.

"You mean the car?" she asked, surprised. "But you know I can't keep it."

"Who you goin' to return it to?" he asked practically. "Don't be a goof, Miss Cornwall. Take it and say thanks. He ought to pay for that black eye."

"But I don't even know whom to thank!" said Ann, inexplicably near to tears.

"Well, leave a note on the bush. He'll be looking for one, you betcha. I think he's trying to make you, that's what *I* think."

In the end, that is just what she did. But she sat there in the maroon roadster long after the garage man had

gone clattering down the hill, before she could decide what to write.

SHE just couldn't sort out her feelings. She was furious at his remark that she was not to be trusted with a gun. And she resented his suggestion that her business was as nefarious as his. Still she was flooded with a sort of glowing appreciation of his need to make amends.

Why, she *liked* that man—burglar or no burglar. He had a charm that was irresistible—just the sort of charm people said Blaine Hastings had. Wouldn't it be gorgeous if he were Blaine Hastings and not a burglar at all? She had had such a persistent hunch that their paths would cross—

"You darned romantic fool!" she snorted to herself. "He's a burglar. An unusual burglar — but a burglar. And I won't fall in love with a burglar!" she stormed, but she put her head down on the wheel and cried about it. In the end she wrote a cross little note on the back of the envelope that had contained his teasing one.

> That revolver doesn't belong to me, and I've got to return it. And I *can* shoot. And my business isn't nefarious, either. You shouldn't judge all night prowlers by yourself.
>
> Of course I couldn't possibly keep this beautiful car. Please leave my flivver here to-morrow morning and take this back. I couldn't possibly keep it. Please!
>
> The coat—well, it fits perfectly, and I need it so badly that I'll keep it. Thank you very much. But not the car, please. And I must have the revolver.

She signed it, and then ruined the effect by scribbling around the edge of her words:

> Thanks a million times for the flowers. They are gorgeous.

After that there was nothing to do but put on the lovely new leather coat, in spite of the twinges of conscience at the obviously costly luxuriousness of it, and climb behind the wheel of the new maroon roadster again.

At the touch of her foot on the starter it purred into life. Ann Cornwall had never been so thrilled in her life as she was when that maroon roadster started to move. It was like a living thing, silken, perfect. It reminded her somehow of the velvety steel muscles of the red-headed burglar as he had carried her down those steps. And he wanted her to have it!

"Oh, why did you have to be a burglar!" she sighed. "I never will get out of the wrong side of the bed again."

And he had gone in the window and come out the door! Ann's heart turned over in sudden fear for him. That was an awfully bad omen—just sheer tempting of fate! He had done it for her, too. It probably meant that when he burgled the next house the owner would jump out of bed and shoot him, or the police would catch him getting away with his loot—and that was more than Ann Cornwall could stand.

Somehow she forgot all about yesterday's unpleasantnesses, and remembered only what she wanted to remember—how live his brown eyes were, how his white teeth flashed, how he had cloaked a decided tenderness beneath a mantle of casualness, how strong his arms were, how thoughtful he had been in sending flowers and a doctor—in replacing her coat and trying to present her with a grand car.

Why, he couldn't be an ordinary burglar—a thief! Not with a conscience like that!

She must see him—warn him about that evil omen! Maybe she could per-

suade him to reform. Why, he could be anything—do anything—with that undeniable charm of his.

She had reached the studio before she was ready to, and she had to go in and explain to the casting director that she had acquired a black eye in preparing for that part, and that she had lost a studio gun, but that she hoped to get it back.

She begged him to rearrange the schedule of the picture so that she could do her part in ten days or so, instead of two days from now. But it didn't do a bit of good.

"It's too bad, Miss Cornwall, but it was your own fault. You shouldn't get stuck in the hills without an adequate supply of gasoline. I'll have to get another girl to play your part."

The jinx was still working, apparently, thought Ann as she dragged herself back to the shiny new roadster. Well, if she could only get that gun back she would be relieved of paying the studio for it.

SO back to the lonely hill road she went. She peered anxiously as she came to the bush where she had left the note, to see if it was still there. And then her heart did that sudden flip-flop again as she saw a new and whole white envelope in its place. She scrambled out of the car and ran to get it.

> Don't be silly, Ann Cornwall. Of course you'll keep the car! We'll have no argument about that. And thanks for being so nice about the coat and the flowers. You are such a regular person and such a gallant lady—pardon me if I harp on that strain—that you surely must understand my terrible need to ease my conscience in the only way I can. You are too regular and too gallant to make me more uncomfortable than I already am.
>
> Anyway, that moth-eaten flivver of yours might get you into worse trouble, and I couldn't bear that. I might not be on hand to get you out of it—nefarious businesses being what they they are.
>
> I'll send your gun to your apartment. Wouldn't do to leave it hanging on a bush. But do be careful with it!

And still no signature! What could she do? She hadn't an idea in the world who he was... Maybe Dr. Blivens would tell her when he came to dress her eye in the morning.

She sat down on the running board to think it out, but there didn't seem to be an out. So she wrote one word on the back of the envelope—"Please!"—and left it on the bush.

Dr. Blivens only smiled when she told him about the car. "Keep it," he advised. "That's the gallant thing to do."

The red-headed burglar's word!

But Ann didn't keep it without making every possible effort to return it. She drove past the bush next morning, and found her own note gone, but nothing in its place. Nor did she ever find another note there, though she looked day after day.

She tried to find out through the automobile agency who had bought that car. She even tried to make them take it back and return it to the purchaser. And in the end she shrugged helplessly and drove it back home. Keep it she must.

An odd thing happened one day. The studio sent her a check for as much money as she would have earned if she had worked four weeks on the picture, and a little note of sympathy for the injury she had received while working for them. Since she had not yet signed for the picture when she was hurt, that was an amazing thing.

Then began the most terrible time of Ann's whole life.

She sat and waited and waited to hear from the red-headed burglar again. She just had to know whether the bad luck he had invited when he was helping her had come upon him. She waited, too, for that revolver to be returned—and it never came.

She jumped every time the telephone rang, and answered it breathlessly, hopefully. She watched every face she passed on the street, and she cried herself to sleep nights, for the red-headed burglar had dropped out of her life as completely as if he had never existed. All she had to reassure her that the experience wasn't a dream was the fading scar on her forehead, the luxurious leather coat and the grand new car.

*"Oh, Ann, darling, I've adored you! But I couldn't come back until I could ask you to belong to me"*

After a while — when she had refused an invitation to a party where Blaine Hastings was expected—she faced the fact that she was head over heels in love with the burglar man.

Burglar or no burglar, she was. Nothing could change that fact.

ANN began to develop an abnormal interest in newspaper reports of burglaries. That flash light prowler who seemed to be concentrating all his attentions on a certain block in the Outpost Section—that couldn't be *her* burglar. The police had decided that this man must be a maniac, for he entered houses, flashed his strong light in sleepers' faces, and then made his escape while they were screaming. No, that couldn't be her burglar.

But there was the jewel thief, who was making the rounds of the Beverly Hills houses. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings and even rings disappeared in the midst of a room full of people—with never a trace of them. It was uncanny.

Ann worried herself almost sick over that jewel thief. She hated herself for caring so, but she couldn't help it.

He had written — "nefarious businesses being what they are—" Wasn't that an admission that his business was outside the law?

Ann acquired some queer habits in those days. She couldn't eat, and she couldn't sleep. She took to driving about Beverly Hills in the evenings, slowing up to peer closely at every male pedestrian, to inspect every parked car. She had a strong intuition that the affair wasn't ended.

The house to which he had taken her for first aid had a peculiar fascination for her. That lonely road was her favorite drive. Past the bush that had served as an unofficial post office, past the target range, up to the peak known all over California as Flirtation Point. From that peak she could look down over Los Angeles, with its myriad of twinkling lights spread out on three sides.

Somewhere down there was the object of her thoughts. What was he doing?

And then one night—it was like every other night except that when she passed the house in the hills a car had halted in the drive for her to pass—she fell asleep in her car up there on Flirtation Point. The cars parked all about her drew away one by one, until only her maroon roadster and another car exactly like it were left.

When she awoke, chilled and bewildered, and with a weird feeling that she had not been alone, the sun was coming up. What would that inquisitive night clerk think of her coming in at this hour? She had never done a thing like this before in her life.

She must stop this nonsense. She must find some other way to ease her heartache. Moonlight and stars only made her loneliness the worse, only increased the load of worry she always carried, only intensified the shame she felt at loving—a burglar!

THAT morning she saw his face again! The morning papers were on the night clerk's desk awaiting distribution when she came in from the garage after leaving her car to be filled with oil and gasoline. She picked up the top one from the pile, to find his face staring at her.

Instead of seeing the great black headlines that were to make life a yawning pit of black disaster, her eyes focused first on his picture.

"Ain't that the fellow that brought you home the night you came in with a black eye?" inquired the inquisitive night man. "Looks like him to me. Y'oughta be careful who you go out with, Miss Cornwall."

Ann never knew what made her say it, unless it was the need to defend her beloved, or possibly the necessity for accounting for her arrival home at sunup, but she said it, just the same.

"He's safe enough. I've been out driving with him."

"Till five o'clock in the morning?" asked the night man with popping eyes.

"Is it five?" Ann managed, clutching her paper and making a rather wabbly way down the long hall.

How treacherous her knees were! Even her fingers were numbed. They almost refused to unlock the door, even though she was faint with her anxiety to find out why his picture was in the paper.

She stood in the middle of the room, her eyes hungrily absorbing every detail of his face—and then she saw the name beneath the picture. Blaine Hastings! *Blaine Hastings!*

Her heart gave a sudden glad leap. Oh, how perfectly right it all was! She had fallen in love with a nameless man and he turned out to be Blaine Hastings! What price intuition now?

Hadn't she known it all along—deep down in her heart? It seemed so now. The sudden tide of happiness that swept her up and up and up was the greatest relief she had ever known. Her beloved was the man she had known she would love—

But the tide of happiness ebbed as swiftly as it had risen, for there was another picture on the front page. Dr. Blivens. Dr. Blivens had been murdered! And Blaine Hastings was the last person who had seen him alive!

Dr. Blivens had been shot in the back as he sat at the library desk in his home, and the house had been looted. Blaine Hastings had been Dr. Blivens's guest at dinner. After the dinner had been served, the doctor's Chinese house boys had both gone out for the evening, leaving the doctor and Blaine together in the library. The Chinese boys reported that an argument was in progress when they passed the open windows on their way to the city. Not an angry argument, they said, but both men's voices were raised, and Blaine Hastings was standing by the open window twirling a revolver on one finger!

The Chinese boys had discovered the doctor's body when they came in at three o'clock, and the authorities had been trying to locate Blaine Hastings for questioning. But Blaine Hastings had not been home that night!

Men have been hung on circumstantial evidence. That was the awful thought that rode Ann's thoughts like a hag on a broomstick.

She flung herself face downward on the divan, clenched fists beating upon it. He hadn't done it! He hadn't! But what could she do about it? Not a thing! Not a single, solitary thing! She could only stand by—and suffer.

THE hours that passed until the afternoon papers were brought to her door were a travail of torment. Blaine Hastings was a mystery man. He cloaked all his actions in mystery. Could it be that he was that jewel thief? Could it be that he was a modern Jekyll-Hyde? Oh, surely not! But wouldn't the police think so?

The afternoon papers increased her fears for him. The revolver that was found beside the doctor's body had been traced. It was the property of the Five Arts Film Company!

The revolver he had taken from her. The revolver he had promised to return—and never had!

Then it was that Ann lost all hope for him. Then it was that she flung herself face downward on her divan and burst into bitter, disillusioned sobs.

AND that was the way the police found her!

"Ann Cornwall, you are accused of the murder of Dr. Blivens."

She heard those words, but they slid off of her consciousness like drops of water off of a duck's back.

Ann Cornwall. You are accused of the murder of Dr. Blivens!

Finally she turned. A burly policeman was standing over her. He took in every detail of her mussed hair, her tear-stained face, her wrinkled dress. And he repeated his words. If ever a girl looked guilty, Ann Cornwall did.

She could only stare up at her accuser and blink groggily. She didn't believe her eyes, nor her ears.

"Come on, sister. You're going for a ride," the officer insisted.

It wasn't real. It wasn't reasonable. It was a nightmare to Ann. Like a wooden doll she permitted herself to be led to the patrol wagon and driven to the police station. All the way she kept telling herself that it wasn't happening. She was just goofy from lack of sleep, from worry, from imagining the terrible things that might be happening to Blaine—

But it became very real when the policeman flung her into a chair at the police station—not gently, either—and she found herself surrounded by blue uniforms and accusing faces.

"Why did you murder Dr. Blivens?"

"I didn't!"

"Don't lie! We've got the goods on you. You got this gun from Five Arts and never returned it. And this is the gun that killed Dr. Blivens."

"I didn't do it!"

Over and over. And while her lips were automatically repeating the denial her mind and heart were fighting their battle. She hadn't done it, but if she convinced the police that she hadn't — if she told her story — they would accuse Blaine! And Blaine had disappeared!

Oh, if she could only keep them from suspecting Blaine—at least until he could get far enough away so that they could never find him—

"Where is Blaine Hastings?"

"I don't know."

"You were with him last night—all night, weren't you?"

She did not answer.

"The night clerk in your apartment said so. You brought your car into the garage at five minutes of five in the morning. You told the night clerk you had been with him. Why deny it?"

"I lied to the night clerk," she managed.

"Then where were you last night?"

Ann eyed them fearfully. Either she or Blaine had to take the blame. She or Blaine. She or Blaine.

"Where did you spend the night?"

"In my car—up on Flirtation Point," she finally told them.

"With Blaine Hastings — planning an alibi, eh?"

Only silence answered them.

"Who killed Dr. Blivens? You or Blaine Hastings?"

Over and over. Over and over, until finally she screamed at them in agony:

"I did! I did!"

"Why?" There was satisfaction in that question. The satisfaction police must always know when they obtain a confession.

But there wasn't any reason why. There wasn't anything more she could say. There wasn't anything more she

*would* say. They made her write a confession, but all she would write was, "I shot Dr. Blivens." But she did write that, and signed it — and then they led her away to a cell.

There, face downward on her hard bed, she realized what she had done. She had ruined herself—for love of a man who had been kind to her. Ruined her career, ruined her life, taken the blame for a murder she knew nothing about and for which she would be punished for life—or by forfeiting her life—all for love of a man to whom she was nothing!

Panic shook her as she lay there. There would be a court trial—or didn't they try confessed murderers? There would be staring eyes, curious faces. There would be flash light pictures of her in her cell, in the court room. And then—and then—they would take her life!

Her life or Blaine's! Her life or Blaine's! Did she love him enough to go through with it? Could she face—death—for him? Was she brave enough?

She had already confessed to that murder. Would the police believe her now if she denied it? Of course not.

IN the midst of her inner turmoil, her cell was unlocked and she was led back to the chief's office for more questioning.

"What time was it when you shot Dr. Blivens?"

Ann could only wring her hands and wail, "I don't know! I don't know!"

"Nine o'clock? Twelve o'clock?"

Finally inspiration came to her. Maybe if she said some definite hour it would help Blaine. But what hour? Blaine had been there at nine o'clock.

"About midnight, I guess. A long time after I watched Mr. Hastings drive away."

"You watched him drive away, did you?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"*Why are you lying?*"

"Lying?" A startled look swept over her face. What had happened?

"Dr. Blivens was shot a few minutes before three in the morning. He was still alive when his Chinese boys came home. Why did you confess to that murder?"

But Ann would say nothing. She didn't know what to say. Had they caught Blaine? Had he confessed? For the second time in her life she fought for consciousness. Slowly the black mist receded. She found herself gripping a chair back and swaying dizzily. Some one was holding her firmly by the arm.

She tried to shake off that supporting hand, but it clung. Not painfully as the policeman's hand had clutched her, but gently. Firmly but gently. There was something familiar, something reassuring in that touch. Finally she turned her head and looked to see who it was.

Blaine Hastings, immaculate in evening attire, was beaming down into her face. There was a wide smile—a tenderness—admiration—

And then Ann Cornwall collapsed.

Her knees gave way, and she sagged into those black clad arms. But a moment later she was fighting them.

"Oh, why didn't you hide? Why didn't you stay away? Why didn't you stay out of this—"

"Why did you take the blame?" he wanted to know.

But Ann's tears were his only answer. She heard Blaine's voice say—"O.K., chief?"

She didn't hear the answer, but for the second time Blaine Hastings lifted her in his strong arms and bore her away.

There was protection and comfort in being held so close by those velvety steel muscles. Blaine's arms were a haven of refuge, and Ann's own arms slid up about his neck and clung there.

OUT of that police station he carried her to a limousine that was waiting. Somehow he lifted her through the narrow door. Somehow he managed to settle himself in the broad seat with her in his arms. And all the time he was murmuring to her:

"There, there, my gallant lady! And *what* a gallant lady! It's all over. You're quite free. Don't cry so, darling. They've caught the murderer. They know you lied to protect me—when you thought I did it. It's all over. Nothing but blue skies ahead—darling—darling—don't cry so..."

And after a while:

"You—you—didn't do it?" she begged.

"Of course not. My best friend?"

"Oh—how you must—hate me—for suspecting—you!" she wailed.

But Blaine Hastings only chuckled softly.

"Hate you, gallant lady? I'm on my knees in awe of your courage. I'm breathless with admiration. I'm—I'm—"

But evidently he decided that this was neither the time nor the place for what he had to say. They rode in silence for a long time, until Ann asked:

"Where are we going?"

"To get you a drink of rare old brandy," said Blaine with a smile. "I don't think it will do you a bit of harm."

Even then it didn't dawn upon Ann where they were going. Her mind wasn't working very well just then. The tortured turmoil of the last eighteen hours, following as they did her night in the hills, were not conducive to coherent thinking. Anyway, she was too comfortable in body to think. She was too relieved to know anything but relief. She didn't want to think. She wanted to rest there—in Blaine's arms—

He had called her "darling — darling!"

The car stopped at the foot of a long flight of stone steps that looked familiar in the starlight. Blaine managed to get out of the car with her in his arms. He started up the steps, carrying her.

"No!" she protested.

"Yes!" smiled Blaine, misunderstanding. She meant that she just couldn't credit the thought that had struck her—that this was his own home, that he had broken a window in his own home!

"One always carries one's bride across the doorsill. It's an old Spanish custom," he teased tenderly.

"Bride?" she breathed.

"Of course," said Blaine Hastings. "Do you think I could stand by and see any other man in the world win such a gallant lady?"

And then the tears that seemed to be continually in her eyes to-day, went coursing down her pale cheeks.

"You're — just — making amends again," she sobbed. "You don't—you can't—love me—"

"We'll talk *that* over," said Blaine, kissing the ear that was exposed—she had buried her face in his shoulder—"we'll talk that over in due course," he continued tenderly. "Seems to me we'll be talking from now on. Wel-

come to your future home, my gallant lady."

THE house was lighted this time, and a grinning Chinese boy opened the door for them.

"Brandy, Ching," ordered Blaine, depositing the girl on the divan that had once been a couch of pain for her. And when it arrived, he offered her a toast.

"Let's drink to the eternal happiness we have earned, Ann."

"I can't believe—"

"Drink it, child," he commanded. And she did.

"Now. Are you quite comfortable? Ready for the story?"

"Yes," said Ann, snuggling down into the pillow, and smiling up at him mistily. "Who killed Dr. Blivens?"

"A dope addict," said Blaine, his face clouding. "A man who came to the house, demanded dope, and then killed the doctor when it was refused—and ransacked his supplies."

"But—"

"Where was I all day?" smiled Blaine. "Out in the desert. When I left you at your door—"

"Left me at my door!" cried Ann, sitting up suddenly.

"Didn't you know that I was with you on Flirtation Point last night?" he asked. "You opened your eyes and looked straight at me once—"

That explained the weird feeling that she had not been alone!

"This habit of yours of driving around the lonely streets at night worries me, Ann," he said, suddenly serious. "I've passed your car a dozen times. And last night, when I got home from the doctor's, there weren't any cigarettes, and I started back down the hill to get some—"

"And saw me driving past!"

"And followed you. I got worried when you stayed so long and never moved, and I went over and looked at you. You were sleeping like a baby—except that once in a while you talked in your sleep—"

"I didn't!" protested Ann, shamefaced.

"You did," he teased, "and I'll tell you what you said—"

"No!" she begged.

"You said, 'I *won't* fall in love with a burglar!' Over and over. And it didn't dawn on me until I got in from the desert to-night that you thought I was a burglar! Oh, Ann, darling! What a marvel you are! You thought I was a burglar—you thought I had killed my best friend—and still you tried to protect me! Ann! Ann! The courage of it!"

He was on his knees beside her, his brown eyes adoring her, his arms straining her to him.

"No wonder I've adored you! No wonder I've ached to go to you! No wonder—"

"Why didn't you come back?" she questioned him. "Why didn't you ever come—or telephone — or — why did you be so mysterious?"

"Because, after I found out that I couldn't forget you—after I decided I was in love with your courage and your gallant spirit—I didn't want to come to you until I could tell you so. I knew that the first time I looked into your eyes I would tell you I loved you. And I didn't want to tell you that until I could ask you to belong to me."

"But—why?" puzzled Ann.

Blaine hesitated ever so slightly.

"There was once a — lady — who was not so very gallant. In fact she wasn't gallant at all... But she is happily engaged to some one else, now, and I am free. Do you understand?"

Ann's arms reached up and went about his neck, fiercely, protectively.

"I'd wait for you—forever!" she vowed. "I've known—oh, for ages—that I'd love you. And I do..."

AND after a long, long time—

"Why didn't you send that gun back to me?"

"I was at Dr. Blivens's when a telephone call came to me. I had to leave town. The doctor said he would call a messenger and return it that night—but something prevented. That's what we were talking about—"

And still later—there were such a lot of long delayed kisses to exchange and they did so interfere with conversation— "How soon are you going to marry me?"

"To-day," said Ann. "Or yesterday—or to-morrow."

"Darling!"

"But I must have a beautiful dress," she planned, starry eyed. "You've seen me twice—and I looked like the very mischief both times—"

But she didn't say anything more for quite a long, long time. Not that it was a very satisfactory kiss, for Blaine Hastings laughed at her, even while his lips were on hers. And laughter and kisses are not very compatible, even though Blaine could not relinquish the delights of one long enough to indulge the other.

# Of You

MY dreams are built of thoughts of you.
Do thoughts of me build daily too,
Brick by slow brick, the house where streams
The silver radiance of your dreams?
However that may be, it's true
My dreams are built of thoughts of you.

My dreams are built of thoughts of you,
Of sudden memories, and a few
Small hopes, that yet are best of all.
My house of dreams, each door, each wall,
Each room—although the house is new—
Is built of you—is built of you!

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

*The gay troubadour leaned dangerously close*

# Love Wears a Mask

*Tricksy Cupid shuffled partners, but the eyes of the heart see clearly*

By Marjorie Gleyre

Author of "The Paper Doll Bride," etc.

"WE'LL have to do something about it!" declared Laura, with an aggressive nod of her neat, dark head at her two comrades.

"To have her walk off with our fellows under our very noses," groaned Bettine, the small, rather plump girl, "when we took the trouble to get them here!"

"And I thought Bob was going to —say something—before *she* entered the picture," put in Neila, her soft brown eyes dark with pain.

"It's just too bad, Neila!" cried Bettine with ready sympathy. "You're

the worst off, because you are in love with Bob. I don't know whether or not I do love Jim—but I certainly don't enjoy seeing him rush away another girl."

The three girls, who sat on the veranda of the Mountain Inn, had their heads together and were talking in subdued tones, careful not to be overheard by a couple of the inn's older guests sitting near by.

They had come here to spend their vacation in a group—the three girls with their three boy friends. It had been such fun planning it. They had all decided that the way to have a good time was to band together and create it themselves.

The plan had worked beautifully the first week. Then this strange, fascinating girl had appeared on the scene.

She had come to the inn, apparently alone, and before the first day was over had succeeded in attracting their three boys away from them. It was obvious to the girls that she did it deliberately—that she meant to vamp them, and would play her game until she succeeded.

"It would have been a dirty enough trick to steal *one* of our fellows," said Bettine crossly, "but to crib all three—that's the limit!"

"Here they come," announced Laura without enthusiasm, as three youths came up the walk swinging their tennis rackets.

"Maybe they'll ask us to play," Neila said wistfully.

"Now, Neila," Bettine shook her small blond head chidingly, "don't play with them even if they ask you. They've a date to play with *her*—and if she's there they wouldn't know we were on the court!"

"S-s-s-h!" hissed Laura as the inn door swung open and Carola came forth.

"If that doesn't knock your eye out!" gasped Bettine.

For Carola had on a canary yellow sport costume that fitted her figure like a glove and made a striking contrast to her jet black hair. She paused effectively in the doorway a moment, and then came briskly across the porch—not as Laura with her boyish stride would have done, or Bettine with her frisky skip, or Neila with her natural grace—but with a mixture of poise and energy that seemed too perfect to be unconscious.

"Bet she practices that in front of a mirror!" murmured Laura.

"Good morning, good morning," Carola was saying affably to each one she passed. "Well, here are the three graces," she greeted the girls, who cringed at her veiled sarcasm. Then, after waving gayly, possessively, to her three waiting cavaliers she turned again to the girls. "Won't you play with us this morning? Do come—it's such good exercise."

"Of all the nerve!" said Bettine, as soon as Carola was out of hearing. "Inviting us to play with our own boy friends—as if she owned them. The horrid two-timer!"

"*Two* timer?" scoffed Laura. "*Four* timer, you mean!"

NEILA was gazing mournfully toward the group at the tennis court, her eyes singling out Bob's tall figure. His crop of unruly light hair and nose that just missed being snub gave him an appealing little-boyish air that she, for one, found irresistible. She felt a surge of anger against this newcomer who was taking him from her.

"Do you suppose she's really en-

gaged?" she asked the other girls. "I hope so."

"That wouldn't stop her—if she happened to change her mind!" said Laura. "Gosh! How she does flourish that ring!"

"Don't you suppose the boys have seen it?" queried Neila.

"Of course; how could they help it? But would that stop them, Miss Innocent? It only makes her all the more attractive to them."

"Do you know what line she pulls?" burst out Bettine impishly. "I forgot to tell you—but yesterday I overheard her—in the morning with Jim—and in the evening with Bob."

"Bettine!" Neila looked shocked. "Have you been snooping?"

"What if I have? All's fair—"

"Tell us what her line is," urged Laura impatiently.

"Well, she twirls the ring on her finger and then looks coyly up and murmurs, 'I wonder if I've made a mistake.'"

Neila drew a deep, despairing sigh. "I wouldn't mind so much losing Bob to a nice girl—"

"She can certainly wear clothes," envied Laura, gazing after her.

"And how!" supplemented Bettine.

"Is she really so much more attractive than we are?" sighed Neila.

"It's not that," replied Laura wisely. "It's her ways. She flatters them—she ogles them—she paws them—" She shook her head dubiously. "I'd like to know how much she pets!"

"Couldn't we try her tactics?" suggested Bettine brightly.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Neila in horror. "*I* couldn't."

"Not even to get Bob back?" prodded Laura. "If you're so keen about him—"

Neila shuddered. "I love him terribly," she said in a choky voice. "But I couldn't act like that for any one."

"Well, if you love him so much, something has to be done," asserted Laura briskly. "And anyway, even if I don't love Andy, I brought him up here to give me a good time, and I don't propose to be ditched like this."

"What can we do?" Neila questioned despondently.

"Leave it to me, honey," was Laura's reply. "I'll think of something. Now, come on, let's go horseback riding—we won't let them spoil *all* our fun."

THAT afternoon when the girls appeared at the lake side in their bathing suits the boys joined them, and for a while it seemed as if the old gay comradeship was to be revived. Sitting beside Bob on the raft, with their feet swinging side by side in the water, Neila felt warm and happy again.

In the six months that she had known him Bob had grown inexpressibly dear to her. She remembered the very first day he had come into the office and stopped at her desk to speak to her—and her heart always beat faster at the mere recollection. And the first time he had walked home with her!

He had been so enthusiastic about this plan of spending their vacations at the same place. Each day he had become more attentive. She had avoided his kisses because she was a bit reserved and shy; but she had been sure he was going to propose—and then Carola had to come! But perhaps Carola was just a novelty, and now that the novelty had worn off, Bob would be interested in her again.

"Saturday's the big night, isn't it?" he questioned, swinging a bronzed arm

idly in the air. Then he brought his hand down to rest on top of hers as if accidentally, and she thrilled at the touch, holding perfectly still lest she disturb that contact.

"Yes—the masquerade ball," she replied, and was just going on to tell him about the costume she had brought to wear, when a trilling halloa came wafting across the water.

They both looked in the direction whence the sound had come. It was Carola in a canoe which she was paddling lazily toward them. She wore a scant scarlet bathing suit of the very latest mode, but it was quite dry. Why did she have to come just now, Neila wondered miserably.

"S'long," said Bob unceremoniously and dived off into the water.

A moment later his head bobbed up well on the way to the canoe. At the same time Neila saw the other two boys start swimming in that direction. So she dropped into the water and swam back to the dock where her chums, similarly deserted, were sunning themselves.

"Good-by, my lover, good-by," chanted Laura sarcastically.

"Hang your clothes on a hickory limb," hummed Bettine, "but don't go near the water."

But Neila could not take it jokingly; she gave a little gulp that was almost a sob. "Bob was being sweet, like old times," she confided, "and then that person came along—"

"I have a sort of an idea," said Laura, her cat-gray eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "If only there's time. Let's see, to-day is Wednesday—and the masquerade is Saturday."

She paused and bit her lip reflectively.

"What is it?" cried Neila, grasping at the hope eagerly.

"What're the glad tidings?" chimed in Bettine.

"Well, I thought if we could find out what Carola is going to wear to the masquerade we could steal a march on her and cramp her style by all wearing the same thing."

"That's clever!" exclaimed Neila, then added sadly, "but what good would it do? She'd get ahead of us."

"I thought if we could keep her from getting to the masquerade at all, we could appear—one at a time—and get our own man—"

"Whoopee!" Bettine clapped her hands joyously.

"If only it would work out," said Neila. "But how will we find out what Carola is going to wear?"

Bettine giggled. "I know already. I heard her say to Jim—"

"Bettine!" reproached Neila. "You were snooping again!"

"I sure was. I want to know just what's going on around these works. I'm watching to see what that woman does to Jim. And if she lays a hand on him I'll—I'll slay her with a sash weight."

"Perhaps," suggested Laura slyly, "you've learned her secret—how she gets away with it."

Bettine shook her head. "No such luck. But I did hear her tell Jim that she was going to be a Columbine, and of course *he* was the *only one* she would tell, and so forth. And then," she tittered at the recollection, "I heard her say the very same thing to Bob—and I bet a plugged nickel she told Andy, too!"

"Then it's up to us to make Columbine costumes—but we'll have to see hers in order to copy it."

"She'll never let us," doubted Neila.

"I think she will if we show her our costumes first," argued Laura. "You

know, the ones we brought with us and expected to wear."

THE plan worked more easily than the girls had anticipated. They got their costumes together in Neila's room, and, when Carola came by the door, invited her in.

"I thought you'd like to see our costumes," said Bettine.

"Why, yes," said Carola, casting an inquisitive look around.

"Mine is the gypsy dress," Laura informed her, pointing to the gay red and yellow pieces on the bed.

"I'm going to be a flower girl," and Neila held up her costume for inspection.

"And I'm going as Red Riding Hood," announced Bettine, giving the little basket a flourish.

"Charming!" said Carola, but it was quite evident from her tone that she was not at all impressed.

"What are you going to wear?" asked Laura, while the others held their breath waiting to see how she would take it.

"Come to my room and I'll show you," she offered, with a hint of condescension. "It's a rather pretty affair."

She led the way to her room and produced the Columbine costume. It was a fitted black satin bodice with a skirt of petals to be worn over a white tarlatan ballet skirt; a cute black hat with white pompons on each side, and a black and white ruff to wear around the neck. They all pretended to admire it from every angle, but they were really studying it with the view of making copies.

"Tricky, isn't it?" said Carola, pleased at what she thought was envious admiration.

Back in Neila's room, Bettine flopped over on the bed and kicked her heels in the air. "She swallowed it hook, line and sinker!" she crowed.

"Do you think we can copy it?" worried Neila. "The hat looks difficult."

"Sure thing!" said Laura. "I'll go to town to-morrow and buy the stuff, and we'll have two days to make them in."

"But how can we keep Carola from the dance?" demanded Bettine suddenly.

"Give me time," begged Laura. "This master mind will find a way."

DURING the next two days the girls were too busy sewing to miss their boy friends. They sat together in Neila's room making their needles fly, and giggling at the progress of their scheme.

"We've got to go in one at a time," said Laura, "and capture our own particular fellow."

"What if one of the other boys sees us?"

"He mustn't. Still, if he does, perhaps when the next one of us comes in he'll think it's the first one coming back." She shrugged philosophically. "We'll have to leave it to luck, and hope for the best."

"It's a good thing we know what the boys are going to wear," commented Neila.

"What did Bob bring?" asked Laura. "Andy has a jester suit."

"Bob is going to be a troubadour."

"And Jim a cowboy. And how," asked Bettine for the steenth time, "will we keep Carola off?"

"Bettine, I'll strangle you if you don't stop worrying me about that," chided Laura.

"But it's important. We could abduct her," suggested Neila timidly.

Bettine giggled as usual. "Try and do it!"

Laura clapped her hands together so suddenly that her thimble flew across the room. "I've got it! We won't abduct her, but her costume!" she cried. Jumping up, she dashed to the window, moved the screen and looked out.

The other girls followed to look over her shoulder, and immediately guessed the plan. The porch roof ran past their window and down the front of the building past the window of Carola's room!

"But who—" quavered Neila.

"Me!" chirped Bettine, dancing with excitement. "I've always envied second story men!"

"At dinner time Saturday," Laura formulated the plot. "Carola usually goes down early. As soon as she goes I'll keep watch while Bettine gets the costume. We must work so quickly that she won't even notice we are late to the dining room."

"You-know," suggested Neila, "I think it would be a good idea not to take the whole costume, but just some essential part—so she might think it is mislaid."

"Good for the girl!" approved Laura. "Perhaps just the satin bodice and overskirt."

A CHARMING little figure in a black and white costume, with a big black and white ruff, paused on the stair landing. Two excited brown eyes peered forth from the black mask and swept over the assembled throng searching out the gay troubadour. He was standing in a corner, fingers idly picking at the strings of his guitar, evidently awaiting some one.

Columbine drew a deep breath, fluffed out her skirts, settled her hat at a more pert angle, and then sped down the stairs and around the room toward the troubadour. He saw her coming and hastened eagerly to meet her.

"Hello, there!" he greeted her, and his hand closed warmly over the silk gloved hand she had slipped through his arm. "I thought you'd never come."

She smiled in reply.

"Let's go out on the porch and dance. It's cooler—and more private."

Neila was grateful for the suggestion, because she had been afraid they might run into the cowboy or the jester! And she thought it would be hard enough to play her part without encountering any complications. She wondered how Carola would act, and prayed that she could keep up the illusion until unmasking time.

Her heart beat hard with happiness as Bob's arms closed around her to dance. Never had dancing seemed such divine entertainment; she had been so lonesome for him the past week, that now his presence—his nearness—filled her with exquisite rapture. He seemed to feel it too, and he held her close as they moved to the music that floated out through the windows.

But when he said, "Gosh! Carola, you're some girl!" she stiffened and was about to draw away from him when she remembered the part she had to play.

"You're a marvelous dancer, Bob," she cooed in indistinct tones, hoping her voice would not give her away.

She tried to see through the windows whether Laura and Bettine had been as successful in capturing their boys as she had been. When she caught sight of a Columbine she thought she must be looking into a mirror! But this Columbine was arm in arm with a

cowboy—and they were coming toward the door. It would never do to meet them.

"Let's go down in the grove," she whispered, surprised at her own boldness.

There were a few rustic benches in the pine grove at the side of the inn, and Bob led the way to one of these. Neila began to feel frightened. How should she act? What would Carola do under these circumstances? And she had a twinge of conscience about Carola! She wondered what she was doing about the missing bodice!

Neila, however, need not have worried about what to do, because Bob took the initiative. As soon as they were seated he reached over and drew her to him. Now what? Bettine has said the boys ought to be taught a lesson. Laura had shrugged characteristically and said, "Leave it to fate."

Neila let her head rest on Bob's shoulder and let him clasp her hands in his. It was no way to teach him a lesson, she knew, but she could not resist the comfort of it. The last days had been so lonesome away from him! She felt his head drooping to hers, and then his whisper reached her ears:

"Kiss me, sweet, please!"

Frightened, delighted, she pretended not to hear and let her head droop lower. But he tipped it gently up to his and begged again for a kiss. With his lips so close to hers she felt irresistibly drawn. Nearer — nearer — then they met in a communion so sweet that her arms seemed to move of their own accord and twine about his neck. In her utter bliss she quite forgot that she was playing a part; she only knew that now she was happy.

Suddenly Bob drew away and sighed deeply.

"I'm sorry," he said brokenly. "I meant to play fair—I know you are engaged—I have no right—"

A sharp pain ran through Neila's heart at the reminder. The kiss had been meant for Carola, not for her! Hot tears burned into her eyes, but she blinked them away bravely. Bob spoke again and she tried to listen.

"I never was tempted like this before to-night," he said huskily. "I thought you were a wonderful girl, of course. But to-night—you—you've just gone to my head."

She trembled as she heard these words. What did it mean? *To-night* he had wanted to kiss the girl he supposed was Carola—but never before. Then the kiss was really hers after all! A wave of relief swept over her at the knowledge that he had not kissed Carola—had not wanted to.

"I'm truly sorry," he was blundering on.

Without replying, she wound her arms about his neck again and offered her moist rosy lips.

IT was time to unmask before they knew it. Every one was gathering in the main room in answer to a bugle call.

Neila accompanied Bob back on reluctant feet. With unmasking her idyl would end, and she shuddered at the thought. What would Bob say and do when he knew that he had been tricked? Over in the corner she saw one of the other Columbines, and she supposed the third one was somewhere about.

While she was wondering if Bob saw what she saw, the signal came to unmask. Bob pulled off his mask unceremoniously, and she saw that his face was flushed and triumphant. He was full of pride at having carried off

the popular Carola for the whole evening!

"Take it off," he urged her.

But Neila felt powerless to move. She simply could not raise her hand to uncover her face. Bob reached up to do it for her. The mask fell aside and she met his eyes appealingly. For a moment he stared blankly, then gradually his face changed. All the joy left it, and a frustrated scowl gathered.

"Neila!" The word was a reproach, a condemnation. "So it was you all the time."

She felt her face paling, and laid a beseeching hand on his arm. "Yes, Bob," she murmured weakly.

"What are you doing in a Columbine costume?" he demanded accusingly. "I thought you were Carola!"

Neila wanted to burst into tears. Instead she pulled herself together to play her part.

"Oh, so you thought you were kissing Carola!" she said scornfully. "Perhaps after this you'd better be sure who you have in your arms."

Just then Bob caught sight of Bettine in her Columbine costume.

"What's the idea?" he growled, and on a sudden suspicion looked searchingly around the room. Sure enough, he singled out Laura, also as Columbine. Further seeking failed to reveal the one Columbine he desired.

*"We can't let her get away with it. But what'll we do?"*

"So it's a trick, is it?" he remarked coldly. "A put up job—to get a kiss."

That stung Neila to the quick.

"You said you were never tempted before to-night," she reminded him disdainfully, and turned to walk proudly away. He made a move as if to detain her, but she ignored him.

By the time she reached her room her pride had evaporated, and when the other girls came in she was lying on the bed in a miserable heap, sobbing wildly. Laura shook her gently.

"Stop it, Neila," she commanded brusquely. "Stop long enough to tell

us about it anyway. Then, if you want to spend the rest of the night crying, why that's up to you."

This was effective in checking Neila's sobs, and she told her story while the other girls listened fascinated.

"But, honey!" cried Bettine, her eyes shining, "that shows it's *you* he really loves. It was you he wanted to kiss—even if he did think it was Carola."

Then they told their stories. Laura had been very distant and unresponsive and made poor Andy suffer at thinking himself spurned.

"He suffered—and how!" she gloated. "On his knees he begged for a kiss, just one tiny little kiss. And I told him it was all right to dress the fool, but he needn't think he had to play the part, too!"

"And I," said Bettine, "I sobbed on Jim's shoulder and confessed I cared deeply, but that honor made me keep my promise to my fiancé."

"What did they do when you unmasked and they saw you weren't Carola?" inquired Neila earnestly.

"Jim was mad as hops," confessed Bettine. "Said something about a 'wasted evening.' Not so hot, that!"

"I think Andy was embarrassed," surmised Laura. "He got red and didn't have much to say."

"I wonder what Carola did?" Neila mused.

"Before I went down I heard her bawling the chambermaid out," Laura remarked complacently. "And Nellie said who'd want part of a costume, anyway. And suggested that she look through her things again, she'd probably mislaid it."

"I guess I'd better put it back tomorrow morning," said Bettine. "I can slip it into her bureau drawer under something. I suppose the boys will be too mad even to speak to us tomorrow, but I'm going to get my beauty sleep anyway. Nightie-night."

As they were finishing breakfast the next morning Carola entered the dining room.

"Now's our chance," murmured Laura. "Let's dash."

So they sped upstairs and Bettine started out the window.

"Wait!" warned Neila, "you haven't rubber soles on those shoes."

"Haven't time to change—but I won't slip. You two keep watch. You know Carola only has coffee for breakfast."

Laura and Neila stood at the door pretending to talk while they kept a vigilant watch. Suddenly Neila paled and clutched at Laura's arm—Carola had appeared at the top of the stairs! They walked down the hall to meet her, both intent on holding her attention until Bettine had a chance to escape.

"We missed you last night," commented Laura affably.

"My costume was stolen!" Carola declared grimly. "I shall report it to the management."

"How dreadful!" Neila managed to gasp.

But Laura said calmly, "How could one steal a costume with all those tarlatan skirts?"

"Just the satin bodice and overskirt were gone," Carola said, and added significantly, "I hear you changed your plans about what you were going to wear."

"Yes," acknowledged Laura coolly, though Neila blushed to the roots of her hair. "We went as Columbines."

"With black bodices?" intimated Carola.

"Our bodices were only sateen—we

wouldn't have been able to compete with your satin one!" She nudged Neila to show that she had said that so Carola would not think that one of them had worn her bodice.

"It was a peculiar thing to do," remarked Carola frostily, looking at first one and then the other penetratingly.

Then she put her key in the lock. Neila grasped Laura's hand in an access of nervous fright. Suppose Bettine was still in the room!

When the door swung open and they saw that the room was empty both girls breathed more freely.

"So long," said Laura airily as they went back to Neila's room.

Bettine was just climbing through the window, her face red with the effort to suppress her giggles.

"I've had such a time," she panted. "Just as I was about to climb into Carola's window I caught sight of Jim down on the walk watching me! He shook his finger at me, so I put my finger on my lips to warn him. Then I got into the room and was sticking the costume in the dresser drawer among her pretties where she'd be sure to find it soon when I heard her voice outside."

"I thought you'd be caught red-handed," said Laura.

"How is the lady?" Bettine asked with interest.

"She's got a black eye!"

"I must dash down and explain to Jim before he does any talking. I think I'll tell him the truth—he has a gorgeous sense of humor—and will appreciate it if he's got over his grouch."

"Don't be nice to him too soon," advised Laura. "Let him suffer!"

Neila took a book and went down to the shore, planning to take a canoe out and drift while she read. As she was about to push off Bob appeared. A tremor shot through her at sight of him. She dropped her paddle and almost capsized as she reached over to recover it!

"Want some man-power there?" he asked rather meekly.

Her impulse was to consent eagerly, but she remembered Laura's advice to "let him suffer," so she made an effort and replied nonchalantly, "I'm just going out to drift and read."

"I'll paddle for you while you read," he offered.

"I can paddle my own canoe," she retorted, though just about ready to give in.

He was going to coax to be allowed to come, she knew that by the way he raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips—a familiar expression of his. But before he had time to say anything, Carola appeared on the path from the tennis court.

"Oh, Bob," she trilled, "you are just the person I'm looking for. I'm in a fix."

"Can I help?" he offered, turning his back unceremoniously on Neila and going toward the newcomer.

"'Deed you can! It's the tennis net—"

Neila shoved vengefully off while Bob marched away with Carola. She felt that she had missed a favorable opportunity, and began to wonder if Laura's advice was sound. She paddled out until she came to a cool shaded spot by the lake shore and settled herself to enjoy her book. But she found that she could not read. Bob's image kept getting between her and the printed page. To think she had been so sure of him that she expected a proposal any day! And now he seemed as remote as a stranger.

The gentle plash of a paddle in the

water intruded on her reflections. She lifted her eyes and saw Bob in a canoe with Carola! He was sitting in the bottom of the canoe, and she was seated in front of him, lying back, with her head resting on his shoulder.

Neila pretended at once to be absorbed in her book, forcing a contented smile. So it was Carola that Bob wanted after all; he had doubtless only asked to go with her because he thought Carola was not available. As soon as they were out of sight she paddled back to the shore in utter misery. Her day was spoiled—in fact, she felt that the whole vacation was ruined. It could not be over too soon to please her now.

When she found Laura and Bettine playing a foursome on the tennis court with Jim and Andy her bitterness increased. Their fellows had come back to them; it was only hers who was utterly false. If Carola were really engaged, her fiancé had better get on the job, she reflected, because it began to look as if he were going to be cut out!

AT dinner that evening the conversation was a little more animated than it had been of late. Mealtime was the occasion when the girls had their boy friends to themselves. It had not been very pleasant lately, because the jolly banter which had been exchanged at first was missing. The boys acted constrained. Laura said it was because they had guilty consciences, but Bettine thought they regretted the fact that they were not sitting at Carola's table! To-night Jim and Andy seemed more like their old selves, but Bob was moody and silent.

Neila had dressed with particular care: set her permanent as becomingly as she could, donned her most attractive dinner dress, put on a careful make-up, and added a dash of French perfume. So much she could do in the hope of charming Bob back to her side; but she could not compete with Carola's vamping tactics.

"It was pleasant on the water this afternoon, wasn't it?" she remarked brightly, trying to draw him out.

"Did you find it so?" he replied glumly.

That silenced her for a time. She wondered what he meant by it. Did he answer that way to discourage further conversation? Or did he think that she was only pretending she had enjoyed herself alone?

By dessert time she had steeled herself for another effort; she felt she must keep him from that other girl. What right had Carola to take him when she was engaged? But was she really engaged? Laura, for one, did not believe it.

"Bob," she said persuasively, "wouldn't it be fun to drive in to town to-night to the movies?" She was blushing at her own boldness, because she had never before asked a fellow to take her anywhere.

"I'm sorry, Neila," he mumbled, "but I'm already dated for this evening."

At this reply her blush faded and she felt herself grow pale with humiliation.

"It's a date I made some time ago, so I can't break it," he added haltingly.

"You don't have to explain," she assured him, while she tried to quell her inner agitation.

He pushed his chair back from the table and rose. For a moment he hesitated, looking very uncomfortable. Then he bent down over her to say, "Some other time—soon," and strode from the dining room.

She sat with a frozen smile for a

few minutes and then excused herself to the others and went dazedly to her room. Bob had turned her down cold, throwing her the sop, "some other time —soon." It was too mortifying—but the mortification was a small thing compared to the ache in her heart.

As she stood by the window fighting her tears she heard a car coming up from the garage, and Bob drove into view. When he drew up before the inn Carola tripped down the steps and climbed in beside him, snuggling down with her shoulder against his.

So Carola was his date! Neila had suspected that, of course, but she would rather not have seen them go off together.

"I don't care!" she told herself fiercely.

Slapping some powder on her nose, she went down to join the other girls. At the entrance of the parlor she paused. There sat Laura and Bettine playing bridge with Jim and Andy! Quickly she withdrew before they had seen her. She had no desire to be the fifth wheel on the cart!

Back in her room once more she flung herself on the bed in the dark and tried to sleep. She must have dozed a while, for the next thing she knew the inn was quiet, with all lights out. That meant it was after twelve.

She got up with the intention of undressing and going to bed, but now she felt wide awake. It was hot and stuffy in her little room, so she went to the window and drew a deep breath of the still night air. That gave her the idea of going down on the porch for a bit.

Curled up in a corner of the porch swing, hidden by a big black shadow from the one dim light left burning, she felt more peaceful. After all, it mightn't mean a thing, she assured herself with renewed hope.

And then she heard hushed footsteps coming up the gravel path and the whisper of voices. Peering out from her retreat she saw that it was Bob and Carola coming back from the garage; and she was grateful to know that she was hidden from their sight no matter how close they came.

And they came very close.

"I told you how much in love I am," Bob was saying in a low intense voice. "I was dumb not to know it right away—I guess I was in love from the first without knowing it."

Neila strained her ears to hear every word. She had no thought of eavesdropping; it was a matter that concerned her too vitally to permit such conventional scruples. Carola's reply was too low for her to catch, but she heard Bob's next words.

"Yes, I am—crazy in love!" he asserted vehemently. "It's the real thing, and I know it!"

Neila felt dizzy; the couple in the dim light seemed to advance and recede while becoming more blurred to her vision every second. Faintly, as if in the far distance, she heard Carola's intense:

"I love you, Bob—I love you."

She saw her arms slip around his neck, saw her draw his head to hers. Then the indistinct picture faded completely; she crumpled over on to the pillows in a faint.

When she came to, a pink light was appearing in the east. She was chilly and stiff and could hardly walk when she dragged herself to her feet. It was a struggle to get to her own room and into bed.

WHEN Bettine came in to get Neila for breakfast, she was still in bed. She explained that she had a headache and would not

get up for a while. So the girls let her rest during the morning, but after lunch Laura came in determinedly. She had surmised it was Neila's heart and not her head that ached, and she did not think brooding in solitude was the best thing for it.

"Come on, Neila, get up!" she urged. "You need some fresh air."

Neila tried to object, but her friend would not listen to excuses.

"Put on your riding habit and we'll take a nice long ride through the woods."

Neila insisted on riding Chevalier, the friskiest horse in the stables, though the groom told her that he was almost unmanageable to-day on account of coolness—for the heat had lifted. The girls added their protests to his, but Neila was obstinate. A reckless, devil-may-care mood had seized her. She did not care what happened, and she hoped something would!

She had her hands full reining in her spirited mount during the first couple of hours of their ride, and she began to get tired. As if sensing this he became more and more unruly.

"I wish you hadn't taken Chevalier, Neila," Laura fretted, watching him.

"He's just playful," Neila answered through her teeth, taking a better grip on the reins.

"I think the boys have seen through Carola," commented Bettine suddenly. "They were awfully sweet to us. But where was Bob?"

At this painful reminder Neila's attention left her steed for a moment and her hold on the bridle loosened. Chevalier immediately took advantage of the opportunity and shot ahead. Not satisfied with the freedom of the road he veered off, bounded up the slight embankment and plunged into the woods.

It all happened before the others could urge their own phlegmatic horses to any speed. By the time they reached the spot where Neila had disappeared she was quite out of sight. They could not even hear the snapping of branches under the horse's hoofs any more.

"What shall we do?" cried Bettine, her eyes wide with fright.

"Wait here—she'll be back." But there was no conviction in Laura's voice. And after a few minutes she said tremulously, "Perhaps we'd better go and look for her."

"We'll get lost ourselves."

"We must keep together and not lose sight of the road—not lose our sense of direction."

For over an hour they searched without any success, and as it was growing late they decided the wisest thing would be to go back to the inn to get help.

Dinner was over when they finally got there, and the guests were in the main room gathered about a log fire, for the evening was cool. Carola was sitting in an easy chair with a book, evidently deserted by the three boys, who were taking turns at ping-pong.

Upon this placid scene burst Laura and Bettine, weary and wild-eyed, with their tale of Chevalier's flight. In a minute every one was crowding about them with excited questions.

"Why did you let her ride Chevalier?" Bob demanded fiercely.

"We must get up a searching party," said some one.

And then Carola's cool skeptical voice rose above the confusion.

"Maybe she isn't really lost at all," she said. "It may just be a little play-acting for the benefit of"—she looked directly at Bob, but finished—"her fellow guests."

"Carola! How can you say such a thing?" exploded Bettine, almost ready to cry.

Carola shrugged. "Neila has probably felt rather neglected lately, and hit on this clever ruse to stir up some sympathy and attention."

"That might be *your* idea of fun," said Laura tartly, "but it certainly isn't Neila's!"

"Well, I think it's a put up job!"

Bob stood undecided, looking from Carola to the two other girls. Every one else seemed as uncertain as he. Carola was so assured in her supposition, which took Laura and Bettine unawares, that they were too agitated and indignant to combat it.

At this moment there was a commotion outside. They all, with one accord, swarmed out on the porch to investigate. A young man had driven up in a smart roadster, driving slowly with one hand, while with the other he led a horse beside the car.

It was Chevalier!

A startled murmur swept over the group. Carola turned white and her hand clutched the porch rail as if for support—but she was looking at the stranger, not the horse.

Bob sprang down the steps and challenged him. "Where did you find that horse?"

"There must have been an accident," he explained. "I was on my way here and I found this horse by the roadside. There was no rider anywhere in sight."

The groom, who had come up, took charge of Chevalier, shaking his own head deploringly.

"I told the young lady not to ride him," he asserted. "But she would have her own way."

The stranger's eyes had been roving over the assemblage on the porch. Now they singled out Carola, and he leaped from the car with the cry, "Carola!" The next moment she was clasped in his arms, while the onlookers stared in amazement.

"Carola!" he cried, "I love you—I know that now. Forgive me, darling. It was all a foolish infatuation. That blonde vamped me—and I fell for it like anybody's fool. Now I know that it's you, and only you, whom I love."

"Ralph!" Carola's voice rose on a rapturous note. "I thought I had lost you, and I was so bitter about it that I've been simply hateful. I couldn't bear to see other girls happy with their fellows—I've tried to come between them. I'm so ashamed!"

Bob stayed to hear no more. Without as much as by-your-leave he sprang into the roadster and sped away.

WHEN Chevalier carried Neila deep into the woods she lost all control of him, and centered her energy on staying in the saddle. She succeeded until he passed so near a tree that she was struck by a low branch and swept to the ground, where she lay stunned.

Dusk was gathering when she came to her senses and looked around in bewilderment. As she realized her predicament she got cautiously to her feet and took a few experimental steps forward. She felt no pain, only an unpleasant soreness, and was grateful to have escaped injury.

She wandered first in one direction and then another, looking expectantly for the road. It grew darker and darker and still she was surrounded by a wilderness of trees.

She called and called in case there was some one within hearing, for now she was thoroughly frightened. There might be all sorts of wild beasts in the woods for all she knew, and the pros-

pect of spending the night at their mercy terrified her.

Finally she was exhausted, she could neither drag her burning feet another step nor utter another shout. She crept under a bush and drew the branches around her for protection. How long she sat there trembling while she strained her eyes to see in the darkness she did not know. But suddenly she thought she heard a faint shout.

Was it a human voice, or the growl of an animal? Her heart beat furiously until it came again, nearer, and she recognized a man's halloa. She jumped to her feet and stumbled in the direction from which the sound came, sending back answering shouts at the top of her lungs. The mere knowledge that there was some one near gave her fresh strength and courage. Several times she tripped over obstacles which she could not see in the dark, while brambles scratched her hands and branches whipped her face.

Now the voice came clearer, clear enough to recognize.

"Bob!" she shrieked wildly.

A light flashed through the trees and she went toward it. At last!

"Neila! My God, Neila!"

He had her in his arms, against his heart. Then, giving her the flash to light their way, he carried her back to where the car stood in the road.

Seated beside her, with her head pillowed on his shoulder, he poured out a declaration of love, interrupting himself at every other word to kiss the color back into her wan face.

"You love me—*me?*" she said, bewildered. "I thought Carola—"

"There was nothing to that," he denied tersely. "I just was curious about her."

"But last night I was on the porch swing when you came back with her, and I heard you tell her you loved her!"

He stared down into her eyes in utter astonishment.

"I never told her I loved her," he asseverated. "What did you overhear—do you remember exactly?"

"I think you said you were 'crazy in love,'" she whispered, sliding her hand into his for the warm comfort of it.

"I was talking about you," he stated, drawing her closer. "Carola was trying to vamp me, and I wanted to stop it once and for all, so I told her that I was already in love with you and it was no use."

"Oh, Bob! But why didn't you tell *me?*" she reproached him. "I was so unhappy."

"It's over now," he declared. "I'll never let you be unhappy again."

As his lips met hers in a solemn promise a wave of utter happiness engulfed her. Her scratches, her bruises, her weariness—all were healed by the warmth of his love.

On the drive back he told her about the stranger who had found Chevalier. How he had turned out to be Carola's straying fiancé come back for forgiveness. Neila's kind heart was quick to forgive.

"I know what she suffered," she said wisely.

NO one had retired at the inn. All were awaiting Bob's return, and the minutes—hours—ticked by while yarns were stifled, drooping eyelids kept resolutely open.

Carola had been sitting in a corner carrying on a whispered conversation with Ralph. Presently she rose and approached Laura and Bettine.

"I want to apologize for being so

nasty," she said frankly. "I'm frightfully sorry."

"It's all right now," Laura accepted the apology in the spirit it was given. "If only Neila is found everything will be jake—"

"The car!" shrieked Bettine. "I hear the car."

Before they could get to the door it flew open and Bob entered with Neila.

"I found her!" he proclaimed.

A cheer arose and spread among the roomful of weary watchers. When the noise subsided Bettine, who had guessed everything from Neila's glowing face, called out, "You found her? And how?"

"And how?" echoed every one suddenly comprehending.

"*And how!*" whispered Bob, crushing Neila to him before them all. And Neila didn't mind!

# *Remember!*

NO doubt, my dear, you think sometimes
I'm not just what I ought to be;
And in that you are surely right,
I'm far from what you picture me.

If I'd a virtue for each fault
I'd be almost a saint,
I'd be almost the picture that
Your dreams and fancies paint!

I'd truly be worth while indeed,
Free from deceit and sham—
If I could only, only be
The man you think I am.

But there is just one thing, my dear,
That may for all atone—
Remember always, come what may,
I love you—you alone!

—*A. Leslie*

*While he helped her on with her coat, his eyes adored her lovely face*

# Little Brown Toad

*"But when I hate you, it's 'cause I love you!" Rodney sang teasingly. But Leah did hate him with good reason!*

## By Betty Bennett

"BETTER put something about you," Tom Dawson advised his sister.

Leah felt a sudden irritation. Her older brother was always telling her what to do. So were her father and her mother, too—and everybody!

What good was it to be seventeen if she was still to be treated like a child. Why couldn't people see that she was grown up?

Put something around her, indeed! Birds in heaven! Hadn't she *intended* putting something around her before she went down to the lake?

Angrily, in her little room partitioned off from the large tent, she searched for a sweater, but there was none to be found. As she came out she picked up her father's raincoat. That would do.

She went running down the path to the lake. Br-r-r-r! The water was cold after last night's rain. In the trim brown bathing suit that brought out her girlish beauty, she shivered as she dipped a foot experimentally into the lake.

"I won't swim—I'll just practice leaps," she decided.

She bent forward, swung her arms, and jumped. Icy water splashed upon her. Heavens, how cold it was! Her teeth gritted, she kept on. She had vowed she would do ten leaps each morning, and she would do them, even if she froze to death.

Nine were finished now, thank goodness!

"OO-HOO! Oo-hoo! Oh, brown toad!" Along the edge of the lake strode a young man, very tall and broad-shouldered and straight. "You *are* a brown toad, aren't you?" He met her startled gaze with a broad smile. "Could I bother you to tell me how to reach the Dawsons' camp? It must be right around here somewhere."

A bright smile broke over her small, expressive face.

"You're Rodney Blake?" she asked.

"None other."

"Father thought you'd come to-day or to-morrow. I'm Leah Dawson," she explained, with a sudden show of dignity.

A little pulse beat in her throat. He seemed to be just as nice as she had pictured him. With his easy poise and athletic good looks, she could readily believe that he had attended a famous Eastern college and been captain of the varsity eight.

"The camp's only a stone's throw beyond those trees," she informed him.

"When you've finished those hoppy-hops you seem to be doing, won't you take me up?" he asked coaxingly.

"Of course! I've only one more to do."

She made a last leap. It was one too many. Instead of landing gracefully on her feet, she slipped and fell flat in the water. Of all the undignified ways to meet a stranger! She scrambled up hastily, trying to look unconcerned.

"Too bad!" Rodney said sympathetically.

While he helped her on with her father's coat, his eyes studied her face—the brown, babylike short curls; the firm, obstinate chin; the sweet, bright red lips. He noted that there was a streak of mud on her forehead, and that the man's coat made her look like a very small girl in a grown-up's clothes.

"What's all this hopping for, anyway?" he inquired, as they walked up the path.

"Last year at a girls' camp we played leapfrog, and had leapfrog races. I got beaten all the time, so I'm practicing—"

She stopped abruptly. The big coat, which reached to the ground, had all but tripped her. She looked up suddenly, and saw that Rodney's eyes were laughing.

"Even if I do look funny, he needn't be so much amused," she thought hotly.

She ceased her chattering and walked beside him with unnatural dignity.

"Why so silent? Tell me more about what you do in camp."

"I'll be glad to answer any questions you care to ask," she replied stiffly.

"Funny little thing!" he thought. "Have I offended her?" Aloud he inquired: "Any good fishing here?"

"All kinds of fish in this lake, Icy Waters. Then there's another lake a little to the east. It looks like this one, and people often get them mixed. That's why it's named Twin Lake. Never go there, because, if you don't know the country, you might get caught in the Devil's Trap."

"The Devil's Trap? Jiminy! What's that?"

"It's a dangerous swamp. It looks like any other piece of land, because it's all crusted over on top; and in most places you can walk on it, but others are just like quicksand. A stranger lost his life in it last year. Once I heard a dog howl and howl until it was sucked down."

"Cheerful stories you tell me! Are you trying to scare me into going back to Massachusetts?" he inquired with a grin.

She smiled back at him unwillingly. He was charming. She could not help liking him, with his gay banter and his amazing good looks.

TOM DAWSON, hearing their chatter, came out to meet them, and Leah hurried off to her own quarters. When she had slipped into a yellow sport dress, she looked into the mirror. The color brought out the rich tones of her skin, she decided happily, and made her eyes look big and brown.

She heard her father come in and greet the guest with much cordiality. Then he inquired:

"Where's Leah?"

"She's dressing," answered his wife from her task of frying ham and eggs for breakfast.

"I didn't know you had two daughters," Rodney remarked in his pleasant voice. "Dad said there was one about seventeen or eighteen."

"That's Leah, whom you 'met,'" Mrs. Dawson explained. "She's nearly eighteen."

"That old? Why, I thought she was a mere child, just a little girl!"

Leah, scrubbing her face—she had discovered the streak of mud—felt her cheeks burn as if on fire. Wouldn't people ever realize that she wasn't a little girl? She hated Rodney Blake.

When she went in to breakfast she held her head high. She scarcely said two words to their guest.

"LEAH, ask Rodney if he'd like to go fishing with you," her father suggested. "I know he wants to go, and I'm not free."

"I'd rather not, father. I don't think he'd care to go with me," she answered, with her most grown-up air. "I'm too young!"

More than a week had passed since Rodney's arrival, and in that time Leah had avoided him almost to the point of rudeness. She wasn't going to give him a chance to laugh at her—or worse still, to be patronizing.

"Tommyrot! He's only twenty-one himself," her father scoffed. "Leah, you've just got to help make his visit pleasant. You know he's the son of one of my oldest friends."

In the end she had to give in.

"I don't want to go!" she kept thinking. "I don't want to go any more than he does—and he said 'yes' just because he had to be polite to father!"

Her little feet in their brown suède pumps took her reluctantly down to the

dock, where Rodney was busy making things ready.

"Better wear rubbers," he advised. "It looks like rain, and rain would hurt those pretty slippers."

People were always telling her what she should do! Birds on wing! Hadn't she a mind of her own? Why had it been given to her if she wasn't to use it? Did she have to explain to Rodney that, though her pumps were suède, they were old and that she never wore them except in bad weather?

"I don't wear rubbers with these," she asserted, none too graciously.

"Haven't you any?" he asked, as he helped her step from the dock to the rowboat.

"Any what?" her father, who had come down to them, wanted to know.

"Rubbers. I was just telling Leah that it's a shame to spoil her pretty shoes."

"So it is. Get your rubbers, Leah. It's going to rain."

People were always ordering her about! Angry red mounted to her cheeks, and her chin lifted. They needn't think they could force her into wearing rubbers when she didn't need them!

"Ask Mrs. Dawson for them, Rodney," her father requested, "since you have to go up again anyway."

Rodney came back smiling.

"Here they are," he said. "I'll put them on for you."

Leah sat with clenched teeth while he pulled and tugged to get the rubbers over her pumps.

Long before the morning was over

*"You never can tell," she murmured into the coffee pot. Then she felt his arms*

she felt as if she had been sitting for centuries, not daring to move or talk. Her companion had apparently forgotten her. She was utterly bored.

She watched the clouds scudding overhead. The sky was clearing, and there would be no rain after all.

Peering down into the glassy water, she saw a fish darting toward the line. She gasped involuntarily, and the fish scurried away.

She could have died with shame at her thoughtlessness.

"See what you did!" Rodney exclaimed, but his voice, if she had stopped to think, was not unfriendly.

Suddenly she was angry at his rebuke. He needn't have shown his disapproval so openly. He might have known she hadn't meant to scare the fish.

They were silent again. At last she asked him to put a worm on her hook. She did not care for fishing, but anything would be better than doing nothing. She held out her hook.

"Try baiting it yourself," he said, handing her the can of worms. "I'll show you how. Every girl should know how, if she pretends to fish."

She did not realize that he really wanted to help her.

"He doesn't approve of anything I do," she thought resentfully.

After she had caught one fish, she did not bait her hook again. She hated worms. No man should order her to handle the slimy things. It would not have hurt him to do it for her.

Suddenly she was furiously angry at Rodney Blake. He was one of those big, masterful men who think they have only to speak and the world, especially the feminine part of it, will obey. Well, he needn't tell her what to do!

THAT morning was typical of many mornings and afternoons to follow. Leah and Rodney were thrown together again and again, and always she was antagonistic, hiding her real sweetness, and showing the stubborn side of her nature.

At times, chided by her father, she tried to be half gracious, but Rodney was sure to arouse her resentment; and then her pretty eyes would flash angrily and her bright lips would set in a hard line.

Sometimes she had an impulse, not merely to displease him, but to make him thoroughly angry. She wondered what he would do; and one day she was to know.

"You're not going on the lake this afternoon?" he asked when he came upon her untying her canoe, the Blue Dart. "Don't you see there's a storm coming up?"

"I'm going to keep near shore," she answered.

"Honestly, Leah, your father wouldn't let you go if he knew."

"Why bring him in?" All her pent-up resentment flamed into life at Rodney's imperative tone. "There's no reason why I shouldn't go on the lake, and I'm going."

"You are not!"

The young man did not so much as raise his voice, but Leah felt that it was going to be dangerous to oppose him.

"I don't care! I won't do as he says!" she vowed inwardly, and took a step forward.

He grasped her arm.

"I forbid your going. What's more, I shall prevent you." His eyes flashed. "If you won't use any sense, some one has to use it for you."

"Oh, indeed!" she cried angrily, trying to jerk away from him.

"You'd better go back to the tent," he informed her quite coolly, keeping his hold on her arm.

"Oh, you—you!" For a moment she was so furious that she couldn't say more. "Take your hands off me!" she cried then. "Let me go! You haven't any right to hold me!"

When he refused, she was a little cyclone of rage.

"You—you're just a big bully! Oh,

I hate you! I hate you, hate you! You *bully!*"

She beat her little fists against him with all her strength. His face went white.

"You can't get away with a thing like that!" he said in a tense voice.

The next moment, as angry as she, he was shaking her, doing a thorough job. Her curls flew in every direction and her face grew red.

"Spoiled, stubborn little mule—no sense—teach you a lesson!" he flung out disjointedly.

Suddenly he stopped, held her as in a vise, and kissed her squarely on the lips. Then he stared at her, as if a little dazed.

"Darn you!" he swore.

He let her go so swiftly that she all but sprawled over the dock. Then he walked away.

Leah pressed her hand against her quivering mouth. In chagrin, amazement, and fury, she watched his tall, erect figure stride toward the tent.

Tossing her head, she picked up a paddle and stepped into the canoe. He thought he had stopped her from going on the lake. Well, she would show him!

"I hate him!" she muttered, as she pushed off from the dock.

She didn't care if a storm came up and she was upset and drowned. She would show Rodney Blake that his commands meant less than nothing to her!

AS she paddled past a point of land, a puff of wind caught her slender craft. Whitecapped waves beat against it, and she was spattered with their ice-cold spray. From overhead came the rumble of thunder, and dark, menacing clouds appeared. In spite of herself, she had to admit that she should not have come out. The storm was not going to pass over.

Oh, well, why should she care? She wasn't afraid!

The full force of the wind caught the canoe. A wave tearing over the side nearly upset it, drenching her.

"Go back to shore," her common sense told her. "There's danger ahead!"

But when she tried to turn back she found the Blue Dart wholly unmanageable. Though she paddled with all her might, she could not make any headway against the wind. She could only try to cut the waves with the bow of the canoe, hoping not to overturn.

The wind drove her swiftly toward the Devil's Trap side of the lake, where the waters, because of underground springs, were shunned by the strongest swimmers. It began to rain, gently at first, and then coming down in torrents. A wave larger than the rest dashed over the bow, pouring into the canoe. Leah's paddle was swept out of her hands. Her eyes wide with fear, she clung to the sides of her frail craft, which was swinging broadside to the waves and filling with water.

She began to scream at the top of her voice:

"Help! Help! Help!"

The next moment she was under water, thrashing with her arms to bring herself to the surface. Her first instinct was to swim to the overturned canoe. Foolish! It was never safe to loiter in Icy Waters; clinging to the boat, she would soon grow numb with cold. She saw only one thing to do—to brave the treacherous waters that lay between her and the nearest shore.

She struck out with all the power of her arms and legs. A dozen man-eating sharks could not have incited her to more desperate effort. She knew

that the more speed she made, the less would be her danger.

Once her face went white, for she had felt the clutch of an undertow; but luck was with her, and she was able to pull herself away. At last, gasping for breath, tired, shivering, she reached the tree-bordered land.

SOME minutes later, in a little tweed knicker suit that made her comfortably warm again, Leah appeared in the main tent. Her brother Tom, a couple of his friends, and her father, who had been driven in by the rain, were playing bridge. As she entered, they looked up.

"Where's Rodney?" her father inquired sharply.

"I don't know," she replied indifferently.

Frightened glances passed between the men.

"What's the matter?" asked Leah.

"He came up from the lake a little while ago and dashed off toward the south," her brother explained. "Dad was frightened, but we said Rodney wouldn't go near the Devil's Trap if you weren't there to guide him."

A dreadful fear clutched at her heart. Rodney must have discovered that the canoe was missing, and gone to her aid. Swiftly she told them what she knew.

It was not difficult to guess what must have happened to him. Seeing Twin Lake in the distance, and not realizing that Icy Waters was hidden by trees, Rodney in his haste had struck out toward the wrong lake.

In a moment they were all in action, looking for ropes, and filling lanterns that might be needed later. When the search party set out, her father tried to send Leah back, but, carrying a rope like the rest, she trailed along. The men divided and went by separate routes, about half a mile apart, to Twin Lake.

Leah went on farther than the others. Presently she halted and gazed at the desolate-looking country before her. A stretch of level ground, almost bare of vegetation, extended for about three hundred yards to the shore of Twin Lake. The passing storm had left it wet and cheerless. Underneath its surface were oozing springs that turned the soil into a substance like soft soap, but heavier and stickier. In most places there was a superficial crust on which a man could walk, but here and there were sinkholes that would swallow any one unlucky enough to step into them.

Leah could not believe that Rodney was caught in the Devil's Trap. That would be too awful to be true. Probably he had lost his way. That could happen easily; it had often happened in this wild country. Perhaps, when they went back to their camp, they would find him already there.

She zigzagged through a not too dangerous route to Twin Lake. Here she began to call his name:

"Rod-ney! Rod-ney!"

Suddenly she stopped breathing. What was that sound?

It did not come again, but with a strange conviction she knew what it was. A human voice was calling out for aid in great peril. Rodney, gone to help her, was in danger of death!

She tried to call his name, but her throat was paralyzed with horror. Already help for him might be too late; and if he lost his life it would be her fault!

"Oh, God, don't let him die!" she breathed. "Don't let him die! Show me where he is!"

As if in answer to her prayer, there

came another cry for help, distinct and long drawn out. Leah ran wildly toward the sound. It was a dash of unforgetable horror, and that horror

She stood still. Her eyes, dark with fright, took in the situation. There were a few bushes not far from him, and a tree just to one side. Other

*The rope had broken! What could she do now?*

was not lessened when she glimpsed Rodney ahead. Already he was above his waist in one of the sinkholes of the Devil's Trap!

"Go back!" he commanded, when he caught sight of her.

treacherous spots, besides the one in which he had been caught, were near him, she realized; but if she reached the tree she would be safe.

Then her heart fell in dismay. Even if she threw him her rope, what good

would it do? How could she, with her frail strength, pull him free? Perhaps it would be better to run for help; but how could she get help in time? She was distraught.

And then a simple plan came to her. Rodney could tie the rope about his body, and she could attach the free end to a branch over his head, so as to keep him from sinking deeper.

The surface bore her light weight easily as she sped to the tree.

"For Heaven's sake, Leah, why did you come?" he demanded gruffly.

While her small feet clung to the base of the tree, and her arms were about its trunk, she explained her plan.

"You'd break your neck!" he asserted grimly.

But already the little knicker-clad figure was climbing the tree and making its way a few feet out on the branch.

"Be careful!" Rodney bade tensely.

SHE flung down one end of the rope, and watched him tie it firmly below his shoulders. Then she drew it taut, and, in amateurish but adequate knots, fastened the other end to the branch.

"Is it going to work?" she inquired, peering down anxiously.

"Like a miracle!" he answered, with a breath of relief. "You know," he went on, "most people would consider me rather uncomfortable, but, compared with sinking into this horrible swamp, it's my idea of luxury!"

And he actually smiled up at her.

"I don't see how you can smile," she told him shakenly.

"Why not? You didn't get drowned, and—"

"Then you *were* going after me? Oh, if anything had happened to you! I'm so ashamed," she said raggedly. "I shouldn't have gone on the lake."

"No, you shouldn't have, you stubborn little mule!"

Those were his words, but it was just as if he had declared:

"That's all right! Now let's make up and be friends!"

Perhaps that was what he meant, for he added: "Why have you always had it in for me?"

"In for you? I—I haven't," she denied.

She was so much interested in what he said that she forgot his position was none too safe.

"Oh, yes, you have! I've wanted to like you, but I might as well try to like a bristling porcupine."

"I don't think you cared for my company," she said, to her own surprise. "That first day you laughed at me, and you told mother you thought I was just a little girl, and—"

"Oh, my dear, don't you know that that's a compliment, and"—his voice softened—"that big men almost always fall for little-girl women?"

A strange happiness was born within her. It might have grown astonishingly if she had not realized that he was not wholly out of danger.

"Really, I think I'd better go for help," she said.

"They're sure to come this way soon," he insisted. "Besides, if the rope should break and let me down into my grave—"

She shivered.

"Don't! Don't talk like that!"

"Would you care if I—"

"I couldn't stand it!" she declared impulsively. Then, realizing that she might have said too much, she added: "I should be to blame, you see."

"I wish you'd left that last unsaid," he told her. "I'd much rather think

that the reason was not—not my being on your conscience, but your hating to have me die."

An odd tumult pounded in her heart.

"You said you hated me," he reminded her reproachfully.

"I thought then that I did," she admitted; "but I didn't!"

He hummed from a song:

"'Sometimes I love you, sometimes I hate you; but when I hate you, it's 'cause I love you!'"

Leah was aware of a queer surge of blood to her heart, and of a groping for answers to strange questions. Was there any truth in a song like that? Had she thought she hated him, but her hate had really been love denied? Was that why he had had such power to hurt and anger her?

Her hands pressed tight together, and her eyes stared out at the settling dusk. Suddenly she knew! She had never hated him. Rather, from the first day she had laid eyes on him, tall and wholesome-looking and erect, strolling along the shore, calling out. "Oo-hoo, little brown toad!" she had loved him.

"WHY so quiet?" Rodney called. "A penny for your thoughts!"

"Why, I—I—" stammered Leah.

She was saved from answering by a tearing sound.

"What's that?" she questioned with sudden fear.

"I think," he told her tensely, "the rope's giving way."

Panic laid hold of her.

"Oh, what can we do? What can we do? It's broken, and it's too short to be tied together again. Oh, what *can* we do?"

"Go for help, Leah!" he commanded. "Hurry!"

She started to climb down the tree. Then she cried, frantic with fear:

"Oh, I can't go and leave you like this! I might not get back in time. You might be gone! Oh, Rodney, there must be some other way. I can't leave you"—her voice choked—"knowing what might happen! You're in too much danger. You might be buried alive!"

She simply could not leave him, but how else could she help?

Perhaps necessity, as has been said, is the mother of invention, for she had an idea. At first it seemed a little wild; but why shouldn't it work? She could lower herself from the branch, clinging to it with her arms; then Rodney could catch hold of her feet and hang on. This should keep him from sinking farther, and at any moment help might come.

Carefully she let herself down from the limb.

"Leah! What are you *doing?*" he asked agitatedly.

"Take hold of my ankles," she commanded. "Hang on to them, so that you won't sink farther in."

"You couldn't stand it!"

"Yes, I can! Oh, hurry! It's the only way. For Heaven's sake, hurry!"

She felt his hands like iron bands about her ankles. Then, a human rope, she was bearing his weight. It was a terrible strain for her frail strength.

"You've got to endure it," she ordered her body, "no matter how it hurts!"

"Help! Help!" Rodney called wildly.

Leah would remember that scene all the rest of her life—the dead branch of a tree in her line of vision; a few straggling bushes taking on weird shapes in the falling darkness; Icy Waters black as ink in the distance;

the sinister murmuring of the wind, and above it, Rodney's shouts for help.

Before long sheer pain drowned out all other sensations. It began in her ankles and raced up the joints of her legs. She wondered if bones could be torn from their sockets. In the dark ages there were torture machines to make prisoners confess their crimes. In the rack a man's arms would be pulled in one direction, his legs in the opposite. No one need explain to her what agony that was. She knew!

She was glad that Rodney did not realize what she was enduring. If he did, he would not let her hold him up a second longer. He must be suffering, too.

WHY didn't help come? Oh, God, make some one hear! Bring an end to this nightmare!

How much longer could she bear it? She simply had to hang on until some one came, and Rodney was safe; but her body shrieked at her that she couldn't do it for ten seconds more.

Her eyes stared, her face convulsed with pain. It seemed as if she was some stricken spirit who had already served a lifetime of torture in hell, and who was doomed to go on through eternity.

Like a pulse beating madly in her heart was the blind, suffocating prayer:

"Oh, God, bring help to us! Save us!"

And then the greatest terror of all gripped her—she was growing faint. Rodney's cries, the tree, her pain, began to float in a sea of nothingness. Through it all ran a slender thread of consciousness, commanding:

"Hang on—hang on—you must hang on!"

She was dimly aware that Rodney spoke to her. Were those shouts in the distance? Did she see lights, or did she only imagine that she saw them? Was help on its way? Everything was growing so hazy that she could not be sure. She could only think:

"Hang on—hang on—you must hang on! God save us!"

At last her body could endure no more punishment. Helpless, she fell from the branch to the earth. A sharp pain shot through her right wrist, which had doubled under her as she landed. She struggled to rise, but the devilish quagmire had already laid hold on her.

"Help! Help!"

She added her cries to those of Rodney, who, half crazy, was screaming:

"Here we are! Hurry, hurry! For the Lord's sake, hurry!"

Sick with fear, the rescuing party dashed up. While Leah's father and brother pulled her to solid earth, the other men worked over Rodney. She was begged to go home and rest, but she couldn't, with Rodney still in danger.

With ropes and boards, and with grim faces, they set about rescuing him. Theirs was no easy task, for now his head and shoulders alone were free. With infinite patience, lest he might receive internal injuries, they toiled to release him. At times they feared they could never get him out, and twice Tom Dawson sank to his waist in the morass. Leah looked on with tragic eyes.

For three long, anxious hours they labored, and then at last they wrenched Rodney free. Their worries, however, were not over, for they knew that he was dangerously chilled and might be seriously injured. In silence they car-

ried his limp body to the tent. Then Tom got out the old touring car to take him to the nearest hospital, which was many miles from camp.

Forgetting her weariness in her anxiety for Rodney, Leah climbed into the machine. She was to go along to have her wrist examined. Her brother, sitting in front, drove. Rodney was on the rear seat and she on the bottom of the car, making him comfortable with cushions. Her heart throbbed in her throat; he looked so pale, so utterly exhausted.

"Is the pain dreadful?" she asked him.

"I'm all right," he told her.

But she knew he would say that, no matter how he felt. A tear fell from her eye and splashed upon his hand, which lay on the seat.

"Why, Leah!" he said faintly. "Don't cry, dear!"

He took her hand, and held it in his.

"Dear God, let him get well," she prayed. "Don't let him die, when I've just found I care; or, if you must, then let me die, too!"

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"Mr. Blake is suffering from exposure, but he'll be as good as new in a week," the doctor said.

Two days later Leah, using a neighbor's telephone, was able to talk with Rodney himself. He seemed in happy mood.

"Have the band ready! I'll be back Sunday; and, Leah," he went on, lowering his voice, "I want very much to see you, dear. I've something to tell you."

Something to tell her? A thousand little quivers of excitement ran through her. For the second time he had called her "dear"!

She could scarcely wait for the days to pass, and yet on Sunday she overslept. She was awakened by her mother calling:

"Leah! Aren't you ever going to get up? You're wanted outside!"

Her blue eyes looked up dazedly, and then a bright light flashed into them. Her red lips asked tremulously:

"Is Rodney here already? Is he all right?"

"He'll never be all right until he's sure you are," replied her mother, laughing. "He's found out that you sprained your wrist. He says I have to trundle you out, or he's coming in. He can't wait any longer to see you, he says."

"Oh, did he, mother? Did he really? What else did he say?"

Leah's lips were quivering with excitement as she reached for her clothes on a near-by chair.

"Isn't she ever going to get up? Is she all right this morning?" came a deep voice from outside. "Is the stubborn little mule all right?"

"She was until you called," her mother answered teasingly. "Since then her pulse has gone up twenty counts!"

"Oh, Mother Dawson, make her get dressed fast!" the young man's eager voice begged.

"I'll be out in two seconds!" Leah called to him.

In not much more time than that she was rushing toward the door.

"Wait! Wait, Leah!" her mother commanded. "For goodness' sake, have you lost your mind? Look at your feet!"

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The little figure in blue bent down

over her small tan pumps. The right shoe was on her left foot, and *vice versa*.

Leah looked up with a grin.

"I was in such a hurry," she explained.

Never in her life had she been quite so excited as this morning. When she went outside, the family—who were outdoors, as usual on sunny mornings — all greeted her, but she heard and saw only Rodney Blake. He looked healthy and strong again. At once he strode over to her.

"Hello, little brown toad! Aren't you ashamed to be so lazy?" he greeted her.

She looked up at him, and her heart forgot to go on with its beating. Oh, he was charming — tall and slender, with his brown eyes and his poise and bigness! Leah had forgotten just how marvelous he was. Just to look at him made something catch in her throat and her knees go all wobbly.

"I left the coffee on the back of the stove," her mother said.

"I'd better go with her and see that she doesn't drink too much," Rodney announced.

They walked slowly through the morning sunshine to the little outdoor kitchen. There Leah cut bread with a long, sharp knife while he set the table for her.

"I never saw that dress you're wearing before," he declared, setting down a plate. "It certainly makes you look young—just a mere child!"

She said nothing. He gave a boyish chuckle.

"Don't you know I'm trying to make you mad?" he inquired.

She looked over at him.

"You couldn't make me mad now, even if you shook me," she said.

"Once I did—by kissing you!" he reminded her. "I wonder if that would still—"

"You never can tell," she murmured, looking intently into the coffee pot.

He made one grab for her. He took her into his arms, and his lips pressed down on hers; and it was just as if a match had been set to dynamite, and something had been touched off.

"Oh, Leah, I love you!" The words rushed from his lips. "I love you so! Oh, I didn't dream there was a girl like you, so brave and sweet and adorable! You're different from any I've known. You made me like you in spite of myself. Why, even when you got me mad enough to shake you, I—I lost my head and kissed you! Oh, Leah, *darling*"—his voice was husky—"have I any chance of winning you?"

She put her arms about his neck.

"I love you, too," she confessed. "If you didn't want to marry me, I think I—I'd just die!"

Then his lips met hers.

*The flames caught her flimsy frock and shot ceilingward*

# The Daring of Love

*For one pulsating moment Kay's destiny as a woman hung in the balance. Then love whispered a plan. But was she justified?*

## By Hebe Elsna

KAY LESLIE descended from the stage with the other "Frivolity Girls," and danced gayly in and out among the tables of the Pinnacle Restaurant.

Her smile gave no hint of the excitement, half pleasurable, half frightening, which surged in her being. For the man who, every evening for the last week, had dined at the Pinnacle Restaurant, and had chosen the table nearest the stage, was there again this evening.

Kay was conscious, as she had been conscious from the first evening, that his gaze rested on her alone. There was no one else in the restaurant or in the cabaret show who attracted his attention.

Well, why should she mind—why

on earth was she silly enough to feel excited? Other men had tried to win a smile or a word from her before now, and it had not mattered to her in the slightest. She had simply evaded them.

But this man was different. It was as though he had some queer power over her; she was conscious that her pulses were beating unevenly, and there was a mist before her eyes.

The Pinnacle Restaurant was fashionable and well patronized. At the moment it was considered quite "the thing" to dine there.

All the time the troupe was dancing the man who sat at the near-by table kept her under observation. Had Kay glanced at him, been able to, she would have seen a faintly sardonic smile playing about his mouth.

Kay was a little thing with a crown of goldy brown curls, and her serious gray eyes struck a rather unusual note, in conjunction with her very youthful figure, and the foamy, fluffy dancer's costume she wore.

Colin Lessingham had come to the Pinnacle every evening for the last week simply because there was something in the personality of this unknown girl which intrigued him; and it amused him to realize now that she was aware of him.

He was cynical, hardened, and with a bitter grievance against life. Just lately he had lived more or less to kill time, for his music, which had been the second dearest thing in life, had failed him. He, one of the best-known composers in America, had not evolved so much as a single theme for six months.

Lenore had ended all that, he mused. Her heartlessness had killed the best in him. When she had left him, she had taken with her every ounce of his creative gift.

This interest in an unknown and obscure cabaret dancer had been the first stir of emotion which he had felt since Lenore's desertion.

He had noticed Kay immediately he had strolled into the restaurant a week ago. Their eyes had met across the crowded room, and he had seen a startled expression leap into hers. A spark of magnetism had been kindled instantaneously.

But although Colin Lessingham was aware that he affected Kay, he had little idea how much, and he would have been amused had he guessed the effort it was for her to preserve her calm.

It was almost a relief to the girl when at last the dancing was finished, and she pranced behind the scenes with the other girls.

A loud burst of applause recalled the dancers. Following their usual custom, they danced out among the tables again.

COLIN had risen to go when they appeared, and he drew back to allow them to pass. As he did so his elbow caught the rose-shaded candle on his table and swept it off.

At that moment Kay was passing. And simultaneously Colin gave a cry of horror, for the girl's fluffy frock flared out in a sudden draft just as the lighted candle hurled itself against her.

With the hideous quickness of such accidents, it seemed but a second from Kay's first cry of dismay before she was literally ablaze.

Colin, as he rushed forward to the rescue, caught an impression of piteous terror on her face, which changed to one of wild appeal.

He had waited only to sweep the cloth from the table, and now, flinging it round her, he crushed out the flames with a force that bruised her tender

body. He held her, the terrified, trembling little creature, in a grasp that was necessarily ruthless.

She did not resist him, though she sobbed a little with panic and fear, and within a few moments the flames were out. Kay's face and arms were blackened, and her right hand was badly burned, but otherwise she had escaped injury.

"How can I ever thank you?" she murmured brokenly. "You — you saved me from a dreadful death."

"Thank me!" Colin's own voice was hardly less agitated. "Don't you realize it was my fault, my carelessness—"

She had no opportunity to reply, for the cabaret girls and diners at neighboring tables were gathering round her, and the flustered manager came bustling up. So swiftly had the scene been enacted that there was no real panic, and in the midst of the concerned inquiry showered on her, Kay suddenly turned deadly white and collapsed.

With a protective gesture the man gathered her close.

"I'll take her home," he said, "and get a doctor. She is slightly burned, I'm afraid, and, of course, suffering from shock. Will somebody please call a taxi?" Then in an undertone to Kay: "You'll let me look after you, won't you?"

She nodded assent. She was past speech, but instinctively she trusted him, and was ready to be guided by him.

The taxi was soon forthcoming, one of the other dancers ran to the dressing room and got Kay's coat, and Colin, with that self-possession which invariably carried everything before it, lifted the girl in his arms and bore her to the taxi. There, without ceremony, he gathered her gently close, holding her across his knees.

"You poor little thing, I can't tell you how sorry I am," he murmured. "I'm afraid you are in great pain. I shall never be able to atone for my clumsiness."

Kay managed to smile at him. She was in pain, it is true, but she was also conscious of a lawless happiness. It thrilled her to be held thus in Colin's arms. She felt that she ought to try and draw herself away—even her weakness was not sufficient excuse for such a surrender; but although she felt this, she made no attempt to release herself.

HOW near was that dark, handsome, sardonic face? Its brooding strength fascinated her. The mouth, which was set with almost cruel firmness, the dark eyes, the thick black hair brushed back from his forehead. It would be wonderful to see that face soften for her, to feel his lips on hers!

The next minute she was furious with herself because of the drift of her thoughts, and the shamed color rushed to her cheeks.

"Does your arm hurt very much?" Colin asked, feeling the shiver which ran through the little body he held.

She stammered:

"Yes — no; it's rather painful, of course."

"Well, here we are at a doctor's," he said consolingly. "I may come in with you, mayn't I? And afterward perhaps you will let me see you home."

The doctor was kind and reassuring. He soon managed to ease the fiery pain, and told Kay that she would have to keep the bandages on for a little while. Meanwhile, she was to go home, take the sleeping draft he pre-

scribed, and he would call round and see her in the morning.

In the taxi on the way to Kay's apartment (she had given Colin the address and had told him that she lived alone), she said with a laugh:

"I hope they'll keep my job open for me. I can't very well dance in bandages."

"Of course they will. I'll go round and talk to the proprietor," said Colin. "I can't tell you how wretched I feel about the whole thing."

Shyly, with her uninjured hand, she touched his.

"Don't be. It's not serious, and I—I—"

She broke off, and Colin said softly:

"If it wasn't that it has caused you pain, I could almost be glad, for it has given us the chance to know each other. I've wanted to know you from the first time I entered the restaurant and saw you. I tried to show you that I did. Did you get my message—did you understand?"

Kay's eyes evaded his, her lips trembled, but, after a tiny pause she said:

"Yes, I understood."

"Then we will be friends, won't we? Say 'yes,' little girl?"

Kay laughed.

"It sounds absurd, and yet I don't feel that it is. I feel as though fate meant us to meet, and yet—why, we don't even know each other's names."

"That's easily remedied. My name is Colin Lessingham." He was more or less prepared for the start she gave.

"Not Colin Lessingham the composer?" And then, as his silence answered: "Oh, I simply love your 'In an Autumn Wood.'"

Colin shrugged his shoulders. He told himself, as he had done a dozen times during the last few months, that he would never compose anything again. And this brought his mind back to Lenore and inclined him to fight against the attraction which Kay possessed for him.

How ridiculous it was to talk of friendship! He knew it was not this that he felt for the girl, any more than it was love. It was sheer magnetism, attraction. When he looked at her soft lips he wanted to kiss them, just as he wanted to draw her into his arms and caress her.

"You haven't told me your name," he reminded her.

"It's Katherine Leslie, but I'm always called Kay."

And she went on to tell him, artlessly enough, the simple events of her life. Such an innocent life. She was nineteen, and alone in the world.

She had few friends, just a few girl acquaintances; of men she knew nothing. She had never thought much about them until she had met Colin's glance in the restaurant.

When the taxi stopped at her house, she rather nervously asked Colin in. She could manage to make him coffee with her uninjured hand.

The girl, seeing his swift glance round, was pleased that her room was dainty and fresh and tidy.

There were one or two bright pictures on the wall; the chintz-covered divan served her as a bed at night. There was one comfortable chair with a big cushion. The tiny kitchenette was curtained off by another length of bright cretonne.

As though moved by an irresistible impulse, Colin's hands dropped on her shoulders.

"You'll let me come and see you tomorrow, won't you?" he said.

Let him! Why, she couldn't bear to think of him vanishing; it was joy to know that he wanted to see her again.

"Please do come," she said. "And don't worry about me. I'll be all right."

For an instant he hesitated, his hands on her shoulders. Kay's heart quivered. Was he going to kiss her? Could she resist, be indignant, if he did? She was ashamed, because she knew that it would be difficult to be resentful; it would be wonderful to be held in his arms, wonderful to feel, for one magic moment, that she belonged to him.

Half to her relief, half to her disappointment, however, he drew back; a shadow passed over his face, making it seem like the face of a stranger.

"Good night, then, little one," he said. "Sleep well."

The door closed upon him—he was gone. Kay stood mute, arrested. She was trembling a little, and her heart was beating madly.

In her emotional stress she entirely forgot her charred white frock, her burned hand. She knew only that the events of that evening had completely altered her from the unthinking, unstirred girl of a few days ago. She could never go back, never. Womanhood had awakened in her heart—a womanhood which was all for Colin.

COLIN called twice in the next week to see Kay, but each time his visit was a brief one. He brought fruit and chocolates, and was concerned about the slow progress of her burned hand. But his manner was absent, almost abrupt. He seemed quite different from the man who had held her in his arms in the taxi, who had awakened her heart to love.

On Colin's third visit he found Kay in tears.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "The doctor says my hand will take another two weeks or so to heal, and they have written to me from the restaurant to say they can't hold my job open any longer."

"Didn't you promise not to worry—to trust me to make everything right?" he asked.

There was a hint of mastery in his voice which thrilled her utterly, but she faltered:

"I—I can't help worrying over this."

"You need not. I think I have a position which will suit you much better than dancing at the Pinnacle, an opening I hope you will take."

"What is it?" Kay asked eagerly.

He smiled.

"I'll tell you all about it this afternoon. I want to have a long talk with you. If the hand isn't hurting too much, perhaps you will let me take you out somewhere to lunch?"

"It doesn't hurt much now," Kay said. "And I'd love to go out. Only my hand looks so bad bandaged. I—I'd feel awkward and self-conscious, I'm afraid."

He realized that this was true. On a sudden inspiration he said:

"Would you come and have lunch at my apartment? My man cooks very decently, and I could telephone him instructions."

It was an unconventional suggestion. Kay hesitated, but only for a second. Her delight in this man's society made it impossible for her to refuse.

"I—I should like to," she said.

Colin smiled with faint cynicism.

"You'll be quite safe with me, you know; you mustn't be afraid," he said.

The hot color flooded her cheeks, but not giving her time to reply, he added:

"I'll do the telephoning, and mean-

while you put on your hat and coat and I'll wait for you downstairs."

KAY loved Colin's place. The small dining room was furnished in a scheme of brown and orange, and there were lovely yellow tulips in a crystal bowl on the table. The living room was three times the size of the dining room; a deep velvety purple was the prevailing color; there was a divan, and some deep chairs, and a wonderful grand piano, across which an embroidered shawl was carelessly draped.

It seemed an altogether fit room for a musician, and Kay gasped with pleasure. The only thing which surprised her, struck her as being vaguely unnatural, was its extreme tidiness.

It was as though Colin read her thoughts, for he said:

"I used to work in this room, but I don't now; in fact, I don't do any work at all."

Kay opened her eyes. "Oh, why—what a pity!"

"Perhaps I'll tell you—after lunch," Colin said.

Lunch was a great success. Kay managed to wield a fork with her left hand, and she found the delicately cooked food delicious. But beneath her appreciation, beneath the froth of their light chatter, she was aware of that chord of magnetism, that link of strange attraction binding them together.

The heady sensation which swept over her caused her heart to tremble within her breast. She had an instinct to fly before some unknown danger, but a much stronger instinct to stay.

"We'll have coffee in the music room, shall we?" suggested Colin, and there was a faintly unsteady note in his voice.

In the music room there was now a blazing fire, and the purple divan, with its silver cushions, was pulled up before it. Colin's man brought in coffee on a silver tray and then left them.

Silence held. Kay raised her tiny cup and sipped her coffee. She knew that Colin's eyes were upon her. Suddenly he said:

"Kay—I want most awfully to kiss you. Will you be very angry if I do?"

She turned her head to gaze at him. She wanted to say something light and yet rebuking. She wanted to hold him off, because it would be making herself cheap to give in, and yet she didn't want him to think that she took him seriously.

But when she met his eyes, the retort: "I shall be furious," died unuttered. She found she could not speak at all, and the muteness of her, the fascinated silence of her, was answer enough.

Gently, yet quite irresistibly, his arm slid round her. He drew her close, then, with a swift movement, gathered her to his breast.

"You're a sweet thing," he said, a shade huskily.

Instinctively Kay closed her eyes, then she felt his lips on hers. They crushed her mouth beneath a passionate pressure, and she gasped—but now wholly with joy. She loved this man, loved him with all her heart, her soul, her body.

His touch set her very being aflame, his voice turned her will to water, his smile gave her a happiness so indescribable that it was akin to pain.

For her that moment in which she lay in Colin's arms, surrendered to his love, passed all too quickly. Soon he gently but firmly put her away from him. Looking into her eyes, he said:

"Kay, you attract me enormously—

there's some vital tie between us. You can help me to get back my music. For that reason I want you to marry me. I'm responsible for your losing your job. I want to give you another, and I don't think you will altogether dislike being married to me. You liked me to kiss you, didn't you?"

*She knew this wasn't love, but her heart pounded hotly in spite of it*

How strangely he spoke. Kay was bewildered. In the moment when their lips met she had known that she loved him madly, but there was no love now in his voice or his manner.

"Yes, I—I liked it," she faltered, feeling compelled to frankly admit the truth.

"We were meant to come together. Listen, child. I want to marry you, but I freely admit that I'm not in love with you. I've done with all that sort of thing. It will never enter my life again."

"You are outspoken, at any rate," said Kay, trying to speak lightly, though her heart ached dully.

"Well, isn't it better to be frank?" he asked. "I won't profess to be able to give you more than I can. What I feel for you is, I suppose, passion, attraction. I'm convinced that what you feel for me is much the same. Love has come into my life once, and gone forever. Then, too, I shall value the peace you give me, the companionship. I like being with you, I like caressing you—and that right will be mine once you are my wife. In the atmosphere you alone can give me, I think I can play once more."

"Do you mean that you can't play now?" Kay said, feeling utterly dazed.

He nodded.

"It left me, you know. I haven't composed a bar since Lenore threw me over. I was mad about her; we were engaged, then she broke with me to go into the movies. Very likely you've heard of her. Lenore Cunningham. She won a beauty contest a few months ago."

"Yes, of course, I have heard of her. I've seen her portrait, too. She is exquisitely beautiful," said Kay.

SHE could have wept. The dream was over indeed. What chance had she against such a ravishing beauty as Lenore Cunningham? She knew that face well; it had been published many times in the papers. Dark red hair, long green eyes, a beautiful, discontented, alluring mouth.

All America had raved about her, and the Apex Film Company had made her a sensational offer to play star parts. Lenore had immediately accepted this offer, and rumor had connected her name with Antony Reslaw, the head of the company.

"That beauty competition turned Lenore's head," continued Colin. "The limelight mattered more to her than anything else in the world. We quarreled. I told her that it was a choice between me and a film career. You see, I hated Reslaw—I had reason. I knew he was a thorough rotter, who married a sweet girl and broke her heart. She is dead now. All this Lenore knew, but it made no difference. She flung my ring back in my face and joined Reslaw's company."

"I'm sorry," said Kay in a low voice.

It was true, he did not love her; the very heartache in his voice when he spoke of the other girl proved his adoration of her.

"It broke me at the time," Colin went on. "My work went to the devil, life seemed a farce—until I met you, Kay"—and he took one of her hands in his. "Will you take me as your husband?"

Could she? The question spun dizzily in her brain. He was offering her at once so much and so little.

"If I say 'yes,'" she said, "it will not be because of the things you can give me. Unless I—liked you—I couldn't marry you. But I've lost my job, and if you really think that I can help you, I—I might consider it."

She could not tell him that already she loved him. He plainly did not ask love of her, did not want it. She attracted him. He fancied that she would inspire his music; it pleased him to have her around—that was all.

Could she agree to marry him? She wanted nothing better in life than to be with him always, but could she bear it on these terms, knowing all the time that the love of his heart was given to another girl?

"That's right," Colin said. "I want you to look at it sensibly. You'll have everything you want, and I don't ask you to love me. I've told you that

I don't believe there is such a thing as genuine love. The girl of to-day is out to do the best she can for herself, and I suppose one should not blame her."

How he despised girls. If any other man had spoken to Kay like this she would never have forgiven him. But, suppressing her resentment, she said:

"How can you be sure that I shall help you with your music?"

Colin smiled.

"If you like, I'll prove that you do," he answered. "I'll improvise something now; and remember, this is the first time I have felt able to touch the piano for six months."

He crossed to the instrument and sat down. Kay watched him, tremulously expectant. Oh, he was wonderful, this man of hers! Yes, he was hers, however much his heart might be buried in the memory of another girl.

Colin struck a few chords, not hesitantly, but slowly, then, as his fingers glided over the keys, a theme evolved. Softly at first the notes fell, like drops of summer rain, then gradually sunshine broke through; laughter was heard, the soft sough of the trees, and then through the melody a bird sang with piercing sweetness. The music swelled to a crescendo and stopped. He wheeled round and smiled at her.

"You see," he said, "you have given me back my music."

KAY'S eyes were shining, her cheeks white.

"Oh, if I can help you to do that—" she began, and moved a step toward him.

Oh, it was worth it, worth the risk, worth the possible heartbreak! She must accept this strange, this almost cruel gift. His kisses, ardent with desire, but unsoftened by love; his caresses, which were passionately fierce and knew so little tenderness.

His arms went round her, and she thrilled to his ruthlessness even while her heart ached.

"You'll marry me then," he said. "Oh, Kay, you are intoxicatingly fascinating. What adorable curls you have! See, they twine round my finger like rings of silk; and you are going to be mine, all mine, every bit of you."

His fingers tangled her curls; he bent his head and buried his lips in the softness of her throat. His hands—sensitive, magnetic hands — ran down her form. She drew in her breath with a sharp gasp. Oh, he affected her terribly; lying in his arms she was weak and helpless, ready to give herself to him utterly.

Through the mad swirl of her thoughts she tried to analyze his character. He was ruthless, cruel; but he wasn't a cad. He did not try to buy her without marriage. He was honest, and at least he offered her all he had.

But this other girl — wouldn't she always stand between them, an alluring ghost?

She tried hard to preserve her self-control; she strained away from him.

"Suppose it should all be a mistake? Suppose Lenore really loves you, and should want to come back to you?"

She saw a dark cloud pass over his face.

"That would be a miracle," he said.

"Well — but suppose a miracle should happen?" Kay persisted. "Suppose she came back before we were married?"

"Well, in that case—I suppose you and I could come to some arrangement! I'd treat you decently, Kay. I wouldn't let you regret—this."

Bitterness surged over Kay. Some arrangement! Did he mean a money arrangement? Almost she drew back, then the knowledge that she loved him better than her soul surged over her. Despite Lenore she would hold him, somehow win him.

"Well, is it a bargain?" Colin asked.

And almost voicelessly she answered: "Yes."

THEIR engagement was, thought Kay, the strangest in the world. They were to be married in a fortnight; on this short space of time she had insisted. She wanted to get her breath, so to speak—besides, her pride had revolted at the thought of going to Colin as his bride without some sort of a trousseau.

She had saved a little money, sufficient to buy one or two pretty frocks, a smart coat and hat, and some dainty undies. These things were essential, and it would take her a few days to get them together.

Colin had wanted to be married immediately, but he had given way to her.

"I'm giving you the chance to back out, if you want to, before the actual day," she said. "If you do, I won't sue you for breach of promise."

He could not be sure whether or not she was laughing at him. She often puzzled him, but she was a fascinating puzzle.

He said:

"There's no chance of that; you know it. I believe in our future together, Kay."

Kay smothered a sigh. Would he ever say that he loved her, even a little? A week had passed, but he had not changed to her in any respect since the day she had consented to marry him. Yet each day saw her more deeply in love with him.

His diamond ring, a beauty, was upon her finger; but too often, when she looked at it, it seemed an empty symbol.

The burns on her hands had almost healed, but the day after she had promised to marry Colin she had written to the proprietor of the Pinnacle Restaurant, resigning.

She and Colin spent most of their time together. He spent many hours at the piano, and Kay loved to listen to him. He had told her that he liked to have her there, and she would lie curled up on the silver cushions on the divan in perfect contentment.

Sometimes he would abruptly cease to play, and would cross the room and drop down beside her and pull her almost roughly into his arms. His kisses would bruise her mouth, and he would whisper tense, passionate words into her ears.

Kay could not help but respond, though she felt that half the beauty was taken out of these moments because it was only passion, and not love, which animated him.

One afternoon, just because his attitude was a little different, her heart sang. He had completed the music to a new song and played it over to her.

"It's beautiful, Colin," she said, when he came over to her.

He took her small hand and pressed her palm against his cheek, a favorite gesture.

"Yes, it's pretty good, the best thing I've done, and it's all owing to you."

She shook her head. "I'd like to believe that, but I can't."

"You may—you wonderful little thing. You'll never know all you've done for me."

Kay held her breath; there was a

tone in his voice which she had never heard before. She was almost glad that he refrained from making love to her. This quiet moment, leaning against him, his hand just lightly stroking her hair, was more precious than lovemaking. Almost she could have believed that he really cared.

And then—breaking the spell—the magazine which had been lying unopened on her lap slipped to the floor. Colin stooped to pick it up, and as he did so it fell open in his hand and a beautiful pictured face gazed up at him.

Kay recognized that face as instantly as did Colin. She saw his expression change, and her heart sank. The caption beneath the smiling, beautiful photograph flashed to them both:

Miss Lenore Cunningham, who appears in "The Distant Sun," the new Reslaw film.

With a snap Colin closed the magazine; there was a hard note in his voice as he turned to Kay.

"What about dining out this evening, somewhere gay, where we can dance afterward?"

Kay agreed, but she was bitterly disappointed. Just for one moment she and Colin had come so near to each other, and then the picture of Lenore had spoiled everything.

She went home to dress—to put on her one evening frock, a white taffeta with a spray of gold flowers—and she and Colin dined at one of the newest and most expensive restaurants.

Afterward, when they were drinking coffee, a man from a near-by table beckoned to Colin, who, turning to Kay, said:

"My publisher. Do you mind if I speak to him for a moment?"

"Of course not," Kay replied.

She leaned back in her chair, sipping her coffee, and then from the other side of the palm behind her she heard a man's voice say:

"Yes, that's Colin Lessingham. Looks pretty fit, doesn't he? Yet the rumor went round a little while ago that he had gone all to pieces, and would never do any decent work again. If it was true, something must have happened to change him just lately."

"Probably nothing in it," replied another masculine voice. "Rumor's a lying jade."

Kay sat very still, but her hands were clasped tightly together. If she had done that! Oh, it was all worth while, and in the end everything would come right.

IT was the day before their wedding that Colin said:

"Marchant — that's the man who wants me to do the music for his new light opera—has just rung up. He wants me to go round to his place and discuss terms. Do you mind if I go, Kay? You see, I shan't be able to see him for another three weeks, as we will begin our honeymoon trip tomorrow."

"Of course you must go," Kay answered at once. "We can even cancel the theater this evening if you like."

"No, we won't do that; no necessity," Colin assured her. "Though you are an unselfish kid, Kay." Putting his hands on her shoulders, he added: "I hardly like leaving you alone to-day. Don't look so unconcerned. Aren't you sorry I'm going?"

"Of course I am!"

Kay laughed lightly, but Colin's expression was earnest, even serious.

"I wonder just how much you—care for me?" he said, his eyes holding hers.

"It is a bit of a problem, isn't it?" Kay answered. "Anyway, we get on very well together."

A dark fire came into his eyes. He said slowly, almost cruelly, as he pulled her into his arms:

*Colin's arms were around Lenore, the girl he once loved!*

"Yes, we do, don't we?"

With the words his mouth fastened hard on hers. He kissed her until she was breathless, until the room spun dizzily around her, and she lay heavily against him.

"Now talk to me in that cool, aloof little way, if you can," he said savagely.

Kay said nothing at all, but as his arms released her she sank down on the divan. Tears were rolling down her cheeks, and as he noticed this all Colin's brutality vanished. He knelt down beside her and said remorsefully:

"Kay, forgive me, I'm a brute. Sometimes I don't understand myself. It's unforgivable of me to treat you like this when you are so sweet to me. I think a lot of you, you know, my dear."

She tried to smile. This was the nearest approach that he had ever

made to a confession of love. Oh, what bliss it would be if he would tell her that he cared—in that way!

Nevertheless, she believed in the wisdom of their planned marriage. Colin was happy, contented; his work was prospering. He often told her that she had "made him all over." Oughtn't that to be enough?

"Of course I forgive you," she said gently. "I'll wait here for you till you come back."

"And to-morrow you'll be mine for always. That's a wonderful thought, you know," Colin said.

He left her with a parting kiss, and Kay sat thinking of him. On this, the last day of her girlhood, she felt contented and happy. She believed that in the end Colin would give her his utmost love. It wasn't difficult to believe that when she thought over the difference there was in him already.

Colin's manservant entering, dispelled her dreams.

"A lady to see Mr. Lessingham, miss," he said.

"Mr. Lessingham has gone out, Wilson," Kay said. "Will you tell the lady?"

"The lady is here," said a very musical voice, and, passing by the butler, a tall and lovely girl entered the room.

Instantly Kay recognized Lenore Cunningham. It was as though a cold hand clutched her heart.

"Is Colin really out?" Lenore demanded.

*Kay stood frozen in the doorway*

Kay rose slowly to face her.

"He is. He went out about half an hour ago. Anything I can do?"

How lovely she was—Kay acknowledged the loveliness with a sort of sick despair. Dark red hair curling from beneath a small black hat; a squirrel coat, into the huge collar of which her dimpled chin nestled; on that lovely, petulant mouth a smile of perfect confidence.

"You can tell me who you are?" Lenore suggested, still in a tone of utter sweetness.

"I'm Kay Leslie."

With a sort of insolent amusement, Lenore's gaze traveled from Kay's hair to her small feet in their patent leather slippers.

"Ah, the girl I've heard about; and you are to be married quite soon, aren't you?"

"To-morrow," Kay replied.

Lenore moved a step nearer. She said:

"You won't marry Colin, Miss Leslie, not if you have any pride. Colin loves me, and me alone. I expect you know that."

Kay's throat felt dry, her heart was beating in suffocating thuds.

"You gave him up," she said. "You preferred fame."

Lenore answered very gently:

"I thought I did. I admit I was a fool, but are Colin and I to be punished all our lives for that? For, I can assure you, Miss Leslie, I know him, and I know that he will never love any other girl while I live. I've come back to him, and once he told me that he would always forgive me and take me back, no matter what I did."

Kay remembered how she had asked Colin what would happen if Lenore ever returned to him; she remembered how he had answered her. Yes, no doubt he would forgive Lenore.

She said passionately:

"You couldn't have loved him, or you would never have treated him like that; joining forces with Antony Reslaw, a man he hated!"

"It was headstrong and wrong of me, but I've repented. Colin will forgive me. I agree that Tony Reslaw is a beast," she went on fiercely. "He promised me the lead in the new film, and then, at the last moment, he got another girl, and told me I wasn't up to tackling it. He offered me a trumpery little part instead. The whole company is going down to Atlantic City to-day to shoot the chief scenes, but I refused to go. I told Tony I was coming straight here, and that made him wild. You see, I knew that it wouldn't be too late until Colin was actually married."

Kay could hardly repress her contempt. The conceit and selfishness of the girl! Oh, how could she ever give Colin up to such a girl as Lenore? Yet if he once saw her, Kay felt that he was only too likely to fall beneath her spell; for he still loved her. One glimpse at that lovely face would almost surely alter everything.

SUDDENLY an idea flashed upon Kay, daring but hopeful. She picked up her hat and coat from the chair where she had flung them.

Lenore, watching her, said: "Where are you going?"

Kay pulled her hat down over her curls. She was conscious of duplicity and half ashamed, yet determined to fight this girl with any weapon.

"Home. Colin must choose between us. You had better wait here and see him, and he can telephone me his decision when he has made it."

Afraid that her resolution might weaken, she ran from the room, but not before she had seen a confident and triumphant smile spread over Lenore's face.

Kay gave brief instructions to Colin's manservant. The lady caller would wait to see Mr. Lessingham.

Not allowing herself time to repent the desperate plan which had flashed into her head, Kay made for the nearest telegraph office.

There she took a form and stood for a moment, pencil in hand, debating. At last she evolved the following:

> Come down to Atlantic City immediately and you can play star part. Sorry for all trouble. Will agree to your own terms in future. Forgive me. Love, TONY.

This telegram Kay addressed to Miss Lenore Cunningham, and added Colin's address.

Would the message do?

She decided that it would. Certainly she had made it sound sufficiently tempting. She wondered if the word "love" was a mistake, but judged that it was not. She was almost certain that Reslaw and Lenore had been on those intimate terms.

With beating heart she handed the telegram across the counter and paid for it to be sent. Within half an hour Lenore would receive it. Then everything depended on whether she stayed, or whether she decided to go to Atlantic City.

Out in the street again, Kay walked up and down, gazing uninterestedly into shop windows, bent only on somehow spinning out the time. At last, when an hour had passed, she sought the nearest telephone booth and called Colin's apartment.

She held her breath as she waited for her call to be answered. Then Wilson's suave voice came to her.

"This is Miss Leslie speaking," she said, wondering at the coolness of her voice. "Er—is the lady who called on Mr. Lessingham still there?"

"No, miss, she left about half an hour ago. A telegram addressed care of Mr. Lessingham came for her, and she said she couldn't wait any longer."

"I see. Thank you, Wilson. I shall be back myself very shortly."

Twenty minutes later Wilson admitted her. Kay had had the foresight to make a few hasty purchases, and she smiled at the man, displaying her parcels.

"Eleventh hour shopping, you see, Wilson. I'm sorry the lady could not wait. I'll tell Mr. Lessingham about it."

She chattered away to the man as she often did. She could see that he was entirely unsuspicious, and she was thankful that he had only been in Colin's service since the latter's break with Lenore. He would not suspect that there was any especial significance in her call—possibly he would leave all mention of it to Kay. Colin and she were to be married unfashionably early in the morning, and it was scarcely possible that Lenore could get back in time to stop the wedding.

When Colin returned he found Kay quietly reading. He took it for granted that she had not stirred since his departure.

For an instant he stood looking at her, and a wave of tenderness stirred him. He put his arm lightly round her, but to his surprise she moved away, giving him a queer little smile.

"Don't feel like it just now, Colin—love-making's off till to-morrow," she said.

THEY were married.

Kay's great thanksgiving was that it had been a quiet wedding, only a few of Colin's friends being present.

In a trembling voice she had spoken the words which made her Colin's. Dreadful to think that he did not really love her; this man who was now her husband. For a moment she almost regretted that she had sent that telegram. She was entering marriage as

an unloved wife—perhaps, after all, it would have been better, wiser, not to have taken this supreme step.

But this doubt was only a fleeting one. Lenore had proved just how much Colin meant to her by her immediate response to that faked telegram. She had fallen back on him when Reslaw let her down; of real love for him she did not possess an iota, and if Colin had taken her back it would have meant nothing but misery and regret for him.

They bade good-by to Colin's friends at the church, it having been arranged that they would give a reception to every one on the return from their honeymoon.

Wilson had prepared a wonderful lunch for them. They would just have time for it before catching their train for Dover.

Colin put his hands on his bride's shoulders. "Happy?" he asked.

But now she was shy of him, as she had never been in the past days of their engagement, and, twisting herself away from him, she said:

"Let me just change this frock. I can't possibly go on a journey in anything so bridal."

Colin thought her shyness rather delightful. He released her, and she ran into the bedroom, where a smart tweed suit and big wrap were laid out on the bed.

Colin, left alone, lit a cigarette and sat down to await her reappearance. He felt marvelously light-hearted and happy, and his thoughts dwelt on Kay tenderly, longingly.

His little, innocent bride—he would be very good to her, very tender with her. Somehow he fancied that he had half frightened her with his passion, though she had returned it, but that should never happen again. Love, although he did not realize it, was welling in his heart for her.

A peal at the bell startled him. There was an altercation in the hall, then the door was flung open, and as he rose in surprise to his feet, Lenore entered.

THE entirely unexpected sight of her stupefied him. He saw Wilson hovering in the background.

"This lady called yesterday. I told her that you couldn't see any one today, sir, but without using force I could not keep her out."

"You called yesterday?" echoed Colin.

Lenore gave an hysterical sob and flung out her hands to him passionately and dramatically.

"Colin, am I too late?" she cried.

"Too late! What on earth do you mean?" he replied coldly.

"Oh, don't speak to me like that," her voice rose in a wail. "You don't understand. I called yesterday. I—I have come back to you, Colin. I was here waiting to beg you to forgive me, to love me again. I met that girl you meant to marry—"

She broke off as Colin cried:

"You met Kay? But she has never said a word!"

"She wouldn't—she's clever." The words were spurted out spitefully. "I told her everything. I begged her to be generous. I told her that I knew you would never change to me. I assured her that you still loved me, and besought her to give you up, and she—she pretended that she would."

"Good Heavens!" cried Colin.

His thoughts turned pitifully to Kay. Poor little soul, that interview must have been a painful shock to her. But why hadn't she told him, why had she kept it all to herself?

Lenore had never looked more love-

ly than now, standing before him with outstretched hands and tear-filled eyes, but her beauty left him cold. He saw the petulance of her hard mouth, the arrogance of her bearing.

"I told her that I'd torn myself away from the sick bed of my mother," Lenore went on feverishly. "I told her I had to come before it was too late, and she agreed, the traitor, to give me a free field. She left the house, and I sat on waiting for you, but within half an hour a telegram came from my mother's nurse—I had told her, you see, that I was coming here—saying that she was dying, and I must go back at once. I couldn't ignore that call, Colin, not even for love of you, so I—I went. When I got there I found it was all a lie. Mother was better, no telegram had been sent. Then I discovered that the wire had been sent from New York—this Kay Leslie had sent a false telegram to get me out of the way! Oh, Colin, answer me, am I too late—are you married?"

"Kay and I were married this morning," Colin answered.

His mind was in turmoil. Why had Kay behaved so? Was Lenore's story true? How on earth was it that he should feel so little moved by her distress, her pleading voice and streaming eyes?

Suddenly it came to him, as with a flash of revelation, that it didn't matter what Kay had done, he would stand by her. As he looked at Lenore it was as though a veil had been torn from before his eyes.

Could this, indeed, be the woman he had loved so madly, whose desertion had threatened to wreck his career, whose very presence on this earth had closed his heart to Kay?

"Oh, Colin, my heart's broken! Oh, this punishment is more than I can bear," cried Lenore, and, with a long sigh, she swayed forward.

Involuntarily his arms shot out and she collapsed upon his breast.

KAY glanced at her platinum wedding ring.

"Colin's bride—Colin's wife." She repeated the words softly to herself as though they were a magic formula.

Then softly she opened the bedroom door and stole down the passage to the dining room. She opened that door very softly, and then stood transfixed.

Colin, her husband, stood with his face half turned to her, with Lenore lying in his arms.

Kay stood motionless as a statue. Her instinct was to fly, but she could not move, her feet might well have been rooted to the ground.

Then Colin saw her. Without displaying the slightest confusion he said:

"Oh, Kay, just get me a glass of water, will you? Possibly it will bring Lenore round."

Blindly, speechlessly, Kay obeyed him, and Colin lowered the apparently fainting girl on to the settee. As he did so the purse she carried fell to the floor, and its contents were scattered.

Colin picked them up. Among other things there was a flimsy sheet of paper, which lay open on the floor. It was impossible not to see the words which were written on it, and a faint smile curved his lips.

"Thanks, darling," he said, as Kay handed him the glass.

Possibly Lenore heard the word "darling," for her eyes opened, and, pushing aside the water, she sprang to her feet with startling abruptness.

"You decoyed me away with a false telegram," she cried. "Oh, what a little Judas you are! I wish Colin joy

of you. Poor boy, I pity him with all my heart!"

A torrent of abuse followed, to which Kay listened in silence. She felt ineffably weary and unhappy. She did not even trouble to contradict Lenore's assertion that a wire had been sent, calling her away to a dying mother.

It was Colin who eventually interposed.

"Well, my dear Lenore," he said equably, "I'm sure you have now said everything that can be said, and I hope it has done you good. All this is hysteria, you know; our romance died a natural death long ago. Had I seen you yesterday I should have convinced you that it is impossible to kindle a fire from dead ashes. I should like to think that we shall always be friends, but my love is given to my wife, and it will always be hers."

Smilingly he put out his hand to Kay, and she took it.

WHEN Lenore had departed, Kay turned to Colin and said bravely:

"Thank you for standing by me—it was loyal of you; but, you see, I know, if she doesn't, that you don't love me. In your heart I am afraid you cannot forgive me for what I did to separate you. Wouldn't it be wise to let our marriage end here? You could easily get it annulled."

"I think that would be most unwise," Colin said, smiling. "Oh, Kay, you darling, I shan't ever give you up! Don't you understand? I've never really loved Lenore, though I only realized it just now. She's a beautiful girl, but she is heartless, and—well, an accomplished actress. I was convinced, even while she was telling her story, that her mother wasn't ill, and I gathered exactly how you had managed to get her away from here when her hand bag fell. Your telegram was there, and it fell into my hand."

"It was a test," said Kay. "If she had stayed yesterday and given up her ambition and Reslaw, well, then I'd have made it easy for you both."

"Thank Heaven she didn't stay," Colin said in heartfelt tones. "Kay, my sweet, don't you see what this has done for us? It has shown us to each other. You wouldn't have thought out that desperate scheme if you hadn't loved me. It was love which showed you the way. And I love you, too, my darling, more than I can ever tell you. I'm afraid our marriage is going to be an old-fashioned love match after all."

"I've always loved you," Kay whispered. "From the very beginning."

Her sweet eyes gazed up into his, and he caught her tenderly close as he whispered:

"Oh, my darling, I've been a blind fool, but we belong to each other now for ever and ever."

*She was in time to see him thrust something hurriedly into his coat pocket*

# The Loyal Heart

*And now the greatest test of all comes to prove Louise's love for Trevor*

## By Ruby M. Ayres

LOUISE'S engagement to Trevor Bruce came to an abrupt end when Trevor himself broke it after his fiancée found him alone in his apartment with another woman —Mercia Swindon, bride of Louise's father's oldest friend. Louise's great love still fought for him, trying to find some explanation of his conduct, and to her family she cried, "He gave me up, not I him! I'll never give him up—all my life!"

Agatha, her aunt, took her to Italy. While there the news of Mr. Swindon's divorce came to them—he had named Trevor Bruce as corespondent!

But upon her return to New York Louise again meets Trevor accidental-

ly and a few nights later she distinctly hears him call, "Little Louise!" as she sits alone in her bedroom. Instantly she answers the call, going hurriedly to his apartment.

## CHAPTER XI

IT was history repeating itself, Louise thought, as she walked slowly up the staircase that led to Trevor's room; only this time she was not conscious of any excitement, and her heartbeats did not quicken, even though she knew that in a few moments she might be face to face with the man who still meant so much to her.

She wondered if his man Dodge would still be there; Dodge whom she had always instinctively d i s l i k e d; Dodge, who probably knew all there was to know about his master—good, bad and indifferent.

She wondered if it was very foolish of her to have come; if she was only to be hurt and shocked as she had been on that other occasion. So long ago it seemed, and yet that sudden feeling that Trevor wanted her—or was "needed" a truer word?—would have been all sufficient to bring her here, even without her brother's clumsy, well meant suggestion.

Then she noticed that the neat little plate with Trevor's name in copper letters had been removed from the door, and at the same moment she saw that the door itself was only closed and not really shut, as if some one had recently come out, pulling it to carelessly behind them and not latching it.

For a moment Louise hesitated, but still she was not conscious of any sensation except a quiet determination. Then she put out her hand and pushed the door open.

The little hall was dismantled, its pictures and carpet gone, a big packing case stood forlornly in a corner, and bits of straw lay on the soiled floor where the marks of tramping feet were still visible.

Then Louise remembered what her brother had said about Trevor being broke. The sitting room door, which had stood wide open that fateful night when she had found Mercia there, was shut, but there was a narrow streak of light beneath it, and as she stood hesitating she heard a sound as if some one inside was moving about.

Louise stepped into the little hall, shut the front door quietly behind her and without any more hesitation opened the door of the sitting room.

Bruce was there, standing with his back to her; but he turned sharply as she entered, hurriedly thrusting something into his coat pocket. There was a little silence, then he said blankly, "Good God!"

Louise went forward. "The front door was open, so I came in."

FOR the first time in her life she was not afraid of this man; for the first time in her life she felt as if he was just a foolish, unhappy boy, and that she was some one very much older and wiser who was able to bring him comfort.

She looked at the empty grate. "Why don't you light the fire, and where is Dodge?"

"Dodge left me some time ago."

Louise said, "Well, it's cold—give me some matches and I'll light it."

She was not in the least surprised when he mechanically obeyed her; it seemed as if their usual relationship was reversed, and that she was now the master mind.

Louise went down on her knees and

lit the fire; the wood was dry and in a moment it was blazing and crackling cheerily.

"There, that's better," she said and stood up, turning to Bruce with a little smile. "Well?" she said.

He stared at her for a moment as if hardly realizing her presence, then his blank look changed to anger, and he broke out furiously:

"What have you come for? I—I—" He strode across to the door and flung it open. "Go home, Louise," he said more quietly. "I should have thought you had had enough of visiting this place."

"I'm not going home," Louise replied. "I've got something to say to you, and I'm not going till I've said it."

He was silent for a moment. "Very well—say it, but please be quick, I'm busy."

"Busy." She looked round the room, dismantled, too, save for a few sticks of furniture, and then her eyes went back to his face, and something in her heart seemed to overflow with pity and she broke out, almost sobbing: "Oh, you poor boy—you poor boy."

She felt as if she was seeing him and understanding him for the first time; realizing too that the smart, debonair man whom she had known had just been a cloak for this boyish-looking, unhappy man with the angry eyes and hard mouth, who looked at her with almost brutal unfriendliness.

He said again, roughly: "You must go home. I don't know why you've come. Who asked you to come?"

"You did."

"I did!" He laughed at that, but he pushed the door to again and came back to where he stood. "What do you mean? *I* asked you to come? I've never in my life asked you to do anything for me."

She knew he was deliberately trying to wound her, but she answered gently, "Yes—you asked me to marry you, Trevor."

"Oh, that!" He ran a hand across his hair with a sort of irritable agitation. "I wonder you like to remember it," he sneered. "You must have been congratulating yourself for months that you didn't marry me."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it. Do you mind if I take off my coat?"

"If you think you're going to stay—"

"I *am* going to stay, Trevor."

Their eyes met, hers very calm and steady, his angry and defiant.

"If I tell you that it's not ten minutes since Mercia Swindon was here, will you go then?" he asked roughly.

"No."

He flung away from her and began pacing the room, and she waited, her eyes following his every movement with careful watchfulness. Presently he came back.

"Very well, say what you have to say. I'm sorry if I was rude."

"It's all right." She slipped out of her coat and gave it to him. "Have you had any dinner?" she asked then.

"Yes—no—I don't remember."

"Well, if there's any food in the house we might have some together," Louise ventured. "I'm hungry myself," she added untruthfully.

He stared at her. "Look here," he said bluntly, "I don't understand what you want, but—"

Louise held out her hand. "I want what you put in your coat pocket when you heard me come in," she told him.

THERE was a tragic silence; the blood rushed to Bruce's face, then died down, leaving him very pale.

He tried to laugh.

"I don't know what you mean—my dear girl. I haven't the very least idea what you mean—I hate to seem discourteous, but I'm busy. You can see for yourself the state this place is in. I'm clearing out in the morning and I've got a lot to do."

Louise said slowly, "Don't you mean that you were clearing out tonight?"

The silence fell again, and Louise felt as if her heart was breaking with pity. Then with sudden impulse she went to him, and before he could prevent her she had put her arms round his neck.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she half sobbed. "How could you think of such a thing—how could you?"

For a moment he stood like a statue, then he tore her arms away.

"I don't know what you mean. I don't know why the hell you've come here—interfering—"

"I've come because I love you! And because if your life is nothing to you, it's everything in the world to me."

She was as white as he was now, but her eyes were brave, and she laughed.

"You can't send me away, because I'm not going—unless you like to carry me, and think what a scene that would make, because I should scream and every one in the house would hear."

Then suddenly she broke down, and was weeping passionately. "Oh, Trevor—oh, Trevor—"

He made a little movement toward her, then turned away again.

"You—little—fool!" he said.

Louise checked her sobs with difficulty; she despised herself for her sudden weakness; she wiped her eyes and tried to laugh, but only sobbed again.

"Yes, I know I'm a fool—you can call me what you like, but I'm not going to leave you. You can insult me as much as you like, but—"

"I don't want to insult you. I only want you to go. You don't understand. Do you know that when I walk out of this place it will be without a cent to my name?"

"It's happened to other men, and they've worked and made good again."

"*Worked!* What work do you think I can do?"

"I'll help you—we can go somewhere else."

"You poor kid."

There was a little break in his voice, and he stopped speaking abruptly. Louise went on with quiet insistence.

"I'm not afraid of work, or of being poor. Other women, more used to luxury than I am, have done it. Isabel Cunliffe went out west and did all the cooking and washing for her husband till he began to get on, and if she could do it, I can. I'm much stronger than she ever was."

BRUCE was standing beside her now, and he laid a hand on her shoulder in a reluctant caress.

"Nobody but a dear idiot like you would suggest such a thing," he said. "But it's impossible. I suppose you think I'm a coward not to face it—well, you're wrong. It's just that I don't care to go on. I've had enough. I'm sick of life, and I dare say life is sick of me. I'm no good to any one—never have been, *you* know that, and if you hadn't come in there would have been one less rotter in the world now." He laughed scornfully. "Mercia told me a few home truths a moment ago; you should have heard her."

Louise shivered, but she said quickly, "Mercia doesn't know you as I do."

She felt that was true; felt that no-

body understood this man as she herself had just learned to understand him.

"I'm not worth understanding, so don't flatter me. Now—let me take you home."

Louise shook her head.

"I can't go, you *know* I can't. You made me come."

"I?"

"Yes. I heard you call me. Quite distinctly I heard you. You said 'Little Louise'—just like that. You did, Trevor—you know you did. Don't deny it—don't be ashamed of it. Didn't you want me? Just for a moment? You must have." She felt it was her own life she was fighting for as well as for his.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I ever want any one or anything for more than a moment? Perhaps you're right. I was destroying your photographs an hour ago—God alone knows why I kept them—and your eyes seemed to look at me—perhaps I did speak your name—but it meant nothing—you know my way. I've often thought about you—since that night we met at the Embassy—I've been sorry too, Louise—"

He stopped.

"Sorry?"

"That I treated you so badly. You were wise to give me up."

"Trevor, I never gave you up!"

"Didn't you? Well, it's no use arguing about it." He picked up her coat. "Let me take you home."

Louise did not move.

"And when I'm gone—what will you do?"

His eyes fell.

"Nothing that you need worry about. Here"—he thrust his hand into a coat pocket and brought out a tiny revolver—"I'll give it to you—just as a parting gift." His eyes mocked her, though they were pathetic too.

LOUISE shook her head. "There is nothing to prevent you from—"

"Only my word of honor that I will not, but I suppose even you will not trust my word of honor."

Louise swayed a little.

"You mean—you will give me your word of honor not to try and take your life—*anyhow?*"

"If I do, will you go home? Some one might come here and find you. Think what would be said."

"I don't think I mind what people say any longer," Louise answered wearily. "It seems to matter so little."

"Does anything matter, I wonder?" he asked grimly.

"Yes—happiness does."

"I don't believe in happiness. I've told you before—not in lasting happiness."

Louise's eyes blazed.

"Well, I *do*," she said shrilly. "I believe in it so much and want it so much that if you send me away I won't go on living. My life's been hateful, hateful, since you left me. I've pretended, and pretended and pretended, and it's no use. I don't care what happens to me any more. If you're sick of it, so am I, and I'll be a coward too—"

"You're talking like a little fool," he broke in angrily.

"Perhaps I am, but you'll see—you'll see." She was almost beside herself; her long pent up suffering was letting itself loose in a flood of wild passionate words. "I won't go on living, I tell you—I won't. I can't." Her voice rose hysterically.

"Louise—" He caught her hands in his. "For God's sake, stop—stop, I tell you!"

But she was beyond control; she was panting and sobbing and struggling against him like a wild creature.

"Let me go—let me go—you've hurt me enough. I can't bear any more. I'd have done anything for you—anything, and you don't care—nobody cares. You all just think I'm made of stone; you don't understand that I'm not just a silly, empty-headed child—you don't understand that I've suffered till I'd rather die than suffer again, that I shall be glad to die—" She dragged herself from him and ran to the door. A moment and she would have opened it and rushed away, but Bruce was too quick for her.

"Louise—for God's sake—come here—listen—Louise—"

He had his arms round her, holding her fast; he half carried her back into the room, pushing the door to behind him.

"Listen to me—I say you shall listen to me—"

Louise turned in his arms, and, half mad with pain and shame, she struck blindly at him.

"Let me go—let me go—I hate you—let me go!"

*"Mercia is dead. They think—Oh, Louise, they think the poor thing was murdered!"*

"Louise—" Then suddenly he was kissing her, passionate kisses on her eyes and mouth and throat.

"You don't hate me—you love me—and I love you. Kiss me and say you love me. Louise—little Louise. Forgive me, forgive me—and I'll never send you away again."

## CHAPTER XII

IT was past three o'clock and the gray spring dawn was edging the window blinds when Trevor said again, "Do you know what time it is, Louise?"

She raised her head from his shoulder, where it had rested during the hours that they had talked and talked, and tried to make some sort of plans for the future. She was so tired that she felt she could fall asleep and never waken again; so happy that her happiness was almost pain.

"No—what time is it?"

"It's past three."

"Oh!" She stood up, feeling weak and giddy, but she smiled, meeting his eyes. "I might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," she laughed. "And I'm so happy I don't care."

"Are you? I believe I am too." He made his admission shamefacedly, and then: "Louise, have you thought what your father will say?"

She shook her head. "I don't think I mind—not very much."

"They'll all say you're mad to have made such a bargain."

"I shan't mind that either."

"You poor kid. We'll probably be kicked out without a dollar between us, to face the cold world," he teased her with a little grimace.

She laughed shakily.

"We're both young, and we shall be together."

"You're so incurably romantic."

She rallied a little to answer severely, "It's a good thing for you that I am!" Then, with a touch of wistfulness, "Trevor, you're not sorry?"

"That you came here and bullied me into promising to marry you? No—I didn't mean that. Louise, I'm not fit for you to marry. Even if I promise to be different in the future I shan't always be able to keep that promise. I don't want to make out that things will be any better than I know they will. You'll have the devil of a time with me—often—"

"I should have that without you, too."

"There'll be no money to help things along."

"I've got a little money my mother left me."

"Enough to keep yourself in silk stockings?" he teased her.

She shook her head. "I won't let you depress me. It's been so wonderful, and I'm so happy—"

"Poor darling." He looked at her with a strange expression in his handsome eyes. "Louise, you've never asked me about—Mercia."

She said hurriedly, "I don't want to know."

But he went on ruthlessly. "She came here this evening because she'd heard I was leaving New York. She wanted me to take her with me—"

Louise turned away. "Well—why didn't you?" she asked in a little strained voice.

"I suppose because I knew you would be coming along to interfere," he answered banteringly. He was wise enough to see that Louise had borne all she could bear, to understand how near she was to a serious breakdown. He went behind her and took her in his arms very gently. "You've got to go

home now, and sleep—sleep for hours and hours and not worry about anything."

She closed her eyes, leaning her head back against his shoulder. Although she was so passionately happy she knew well enough what a long and difficult journey still lay before her.

Even after they were married—and now she was sure they would be married—life was not going to be easy. She had got the man she wanted, but the price was not yet paid—perhaps it would never be paid as long as they both lived, but it was worth it. She believed in the power of her love for him, and she believed that he loved her; not as she understood love perhaps, but as he understood it. He might wander away from her, but he would always come back, and that would be better than the pain she had suffered during the past months, believing he would never come back.

He kissed her gently and let her go.

"I must see if I can find a taxi. I suppose the whole household will be frantically searching for you when we get back."

"I don't think so. Father and Agatha went out to dinner and I locked my bedroom door before I came away."

"You don't mind being left for a moment?"

"Oh, no."

HE went away then, and Louise put on her coat and looked at herself in the glass. Pale, with tired swollen eyes and disordered hair, yet there was a smile on her lips and a song in her heart.

She went to the window and drew the curtains back, looking out into the empty street. Life would never be the same again. Lying before her there was hardship and perhaps tears and fresh disillusionment, and yet through it all there would always be something of happiness because she was to be Trevor's wife. She tried to think, but she was too tired, and when Trevor came back she was crouched on the rug by the fire that had almost died out, half asleep.

He lifted her gently.

"Come along. Haven't you got a hat?"

"I didn't wear one."

He kept his arm round her as they went downstairs to the street, and at the entrance they ran into a man who stared curiously before he nodded to Trevor in rather unfriendly fashion.

"He lives in the apartment below mine," Trevor said. "A late bird, as I am."

There was a taxicab waiting, but the driver only gave them a casual glance; he was used to strange faces at strange hours of the night.

All the way home Louise dozed with her head against Trevor's shoulder and her hand in his, and he sat staring before him with frowning brows. "A hell of a mess—" he was thinking, and then when he glanced down at the face against his shoulder, his eyes softened. He loved her better than he had loved any other woman—perhaps as well as he could love any woman, and yet—the cab stopped with a little grinding sound, and Louise woke up with a start.

It was getting light quickly, but her father's house looked asleep and peaceful.

Louise said sleepily, "There won't be a row to-night anyway." Then she laughed and added, "but I suppose it's morning."

"Have you got a key?" Trevor asked.

"Yes."

The taxicab had driven away. Trevor said he would prefer to walk back, and he kissed her and waited till she was safely indoors, then he turned and walked away.

"A hell of a mess," he told himself again, but he was not unhappy.

Louise crept upstairs and into her own room. She felt as if she was walking in her sleep, as if everything was only something she had dreamed. And yet her lips still throbbed with Trevor's kisses, and she could feel the pressure of his arms around her.

She undressed, still half asleep, leaving her clothes in a little heap on the floor, and almost fell into bed.

Outside a bird was twittering in the dawn and a faint tinge of pink was creeping over the gray world.

Louise was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow, but it was not a happy sleep. She dreamed that she was running barefooted through darkness, and that somewhere far ahead of her she could hear Trevor's voice calling to her; Trevor's voice, and yet not like his, for it held a note of agony she had never heard in a human voice before, and the faster she ran the farther he seemed to get from her, though she could plainly distinguish the words he was crying out to her:

"Don't give me up, little Louise—don't give me up."

And she tried to cry out in reply, tried to shout so that her voice could reach him. "I shall never give you up—never." But she could only speak in a whisper, and in the desperate struggle to reach him she woke.

It was broad daylight, and Agatha was standing beside the bed.

Louise looked at her with frightened eyes.

"Oh—is anything the matter?"

"No, only you've slept so late, dear."

"Late! What time is it then?"

"It's nearly lunch time. I wouldn't let them wake you. Are you quite well, Louise?"

"Of course." Louise was sitting up now, rubbing her eyes, but she was still trembling with the effort of that dream race, and Trevor's far cry was ringing faintly in her ears: *"Don't give me up—don't give me up."*

"I'll have coffee sent up and some toast," Agatha offered. "I began to think you must be ill."

"Oh, no—of course not. I suppose I was tired."

"We came in rather late. I came to your room, but the door was locked so I didn't wake you."

"No," Louise slipped out of bed and into a dressing gown. "I'll get up at once."

"Wait till you've had your coffee. I'll go and order it."

Agatha turned to go, and Louise said:

"Come back presently, will you? I want to tell you something."

"Yes."

WHEN she was alone Louise went to the window and opened it. Was it just a dream that Trevor had held her in his arms again and kissed her? That he had said they would be married?

"It's real, it's real," Louise whispered. "And I'm happy, happy—"

Agatha came and sat on the bed while Louise drank her coffee; she looked rather preoccupied, and, for once in her life, was not smoking.

"A penny for your thoughts," Louise began. "Don't look so grave, because I want to tell you something important."

"Do you? I want to tell you something first. It's bad news, Louise—no, not the boys or anything, but it will be a shock to you—it's Mercia Swindon."

"Mercia?"

"Yes—don't look so frightened, Louise; it's nothing to do with any of us, but—well, she is dead."

"*Dead,* but—" Louise checked herself in time; she had been going to say: "But she was in Trevor's apartment last night."

Agatha nodded. "She was found late last night—"

"Found? You mean—what do you mean?"

"She was shot through the heart. They think—oh, Louise, they think the poor thing was murdered!"

## CHAPTER XIII

LOUISE found herself thinking—"And this, of course, is still part of my dream. I'm fast asleep. In a minute I shall wake up and laugh at it all."

She rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes, but when she looked again Agatha was still there and the sun was still shining.

"I must say something," Louise thought. "She'll think it strange if I sit here and say nothing. What can I say?" When she tried to speak her lips felt dry and stiff and no words would come.

Agatha went on in her quiet voice: "Your father didn't want me to tell you, but I knew you would rather I did."

There was a little silence.

"Where—where did they find her?" Louise asked then.

Agatha shook her head. "I'm not sure—there was only a small paragraph in the paper this morning. I dare say we shall hear more in the evening papers."

"Yes."

"Perhaps it's the best way out for her." Agatha seemed to speak with rather an effort. "I think she would have had a tragic life if she had lived."

"Yes," Louise answered with a great effort. "You know Trevor was not going to marry her?"

"I rather imagined it; your father always said he never would."

Louise laughed, a little laugh that trembled on something that was no longer happiness. "He couldn't very well, you see," she said, "because he is going to marry me."

"Louise!" There was a note of great distress in Agatha's voice. "Oh, Louise, what are you saying?"

"Only just the truth; we're going to be married and we're going abroad. Oh, I know what you'll all say, of course, but I don't care. We're going to be married and we're going to start life all over again together." Suddenly she put out her hand and clutched Agatha's. "Say you're glad; say you hope I'll be happy!"

"Happy!"

Agatha drew her hand sharply away and went over to the window, where she stood looking out at the sunshine. There was a long silence.

"Well, I may as well get up," the girl announced. "I don't want anything more to eat. I'll get up."

She slipped out of bed again and began gathering up her clothes and bath sponge. Her heart was beating fast, and she felt jerky, as if something had frightened her. Frightened! How absurd! N o t h i n g had happened, nothing at all except that a poor woman had been found dead. Found dead—how horrible!

Louise thought suddenly of Mercia

as she had been when they first met. So pretty, so happy, or hadn't she been happy? It was so hard to tell; so often a smiling face hid tragedy. She broke out again nervously, "I'll have a bath and dress. I'm sorry I'm so late. It was silly to sleep so long." But when she turned to the door Agatha stopped her.

"Whatever you say will make no difference—Trevor and I are going to be married"

"Louise—wait a moment."

She came back and stood looking down at the girl with troubled eyes.

"When did this happen? I mean—when did you see Trevor?"

"Does that matter?"

"I only asked because—yesterday I never dreamed—never thought—you never told me—"

Louise looked a little flushed and defiant.

"No one has been so sympathetic with me that I was very anxious to tell even you," she said. "I know none of you ever liked him." She raised her voice a little. "It won't make any difference what you say, or what father says, I shall marry him—no matter what happens."

"Louise, that is just what I said

more than twenty years ago, when people advised me not to marry Hal."

"But you married him."

"Yes."

"And you didn't regret it?"

"I—well—" Agatha turned away; she knew the futility of argument; knew that when one is young and in love there is no argument in the world powerful enough to convince.

Louise slipped away. Found dead! The words haunted her all the time she was dressing. Poor, pretty Mercia, what an ending to a life that might have been so happy.

What would Lionel Swindon say? Would he mind? Had he loved her? Of course she must have shot herself, that was the simple explanation of it all; tired of life perhaps, and the failure she had made of it. Of course Trevor would be dragged in—the papers would recall the too recent divorce case, and perhaps publish his photograph and Mercia's together.

Louise bit her lip till it bled. Horrible! And just when she was so happy.

SHE made no attempt to look at the paper; she knew all she wanted to know, and, after all, it was no concern of hers, except that she was sorry for Swindon.

It would make things more difficult, of course; her father would be more furious than ever at this new publicity; she could imagine how he would rave.

"My daughter marry a scoundrel who's been mixed up in a divorce case and a suicide!"

Or wasn't it suicide? Agatha had said—yes, but Agatha had no grounds for saying such a thing. It was only what "people" thought, who ever "people" were.

Trevor would be shocked, too; he had seen Mercia so recently; perhaps he had been the very last person to see her alive.

The *last!* Louise felt her lips going cold. The *last!* Then that would mean that they would call on him to give evidence at the inquest, because, of course, there would have to be an inquest. Horrible—horrible!

Agatha came into the room. "What about a walk, Louise? It's such a lovely day!"

Louise shook her head. "I don't want to go out; besides, Trevor will be coming."

"Oh." There was a silence. "I suppose he *will* come?" Agatha said constrainedly.

Louise laughed. "Oh, I know what you think, of course, that he will treat me just as he used to; but he won't, you'll see—he's quite different now—we understand each other. We're going to be happy. Of course I know all this will make it unpleasant; they'll drag Trevor's name into it, but that's not his fault, and it makes no difference to me. People are so fond of raking up scandal—" She stopped suddenly, conscious of Agatha's pitying eyes. Then, after a moment, she broke out again. "Why do you look at me like that? I thought *you'd* understand even if the others didn't—I thought—"

"My dear, I do understand. It's only—"

"Only that you would so much rather I married Silas, I suppose, and have heaps of money and nothing else. Well. Oh, I'm *sorry* to be so horrid, but you'd feel just as I do if you were me."

Agatha put an arm round her and kissed her.

"I know; we won't quarrel about it. Come for a walk. Trevor won't be here for an hour at any rate, and you look

as if some fresh air will do you good."

"Very well. I can leave a message and ask him to wait."

They stayed out for more than an hour. It seemed to Louise that her aunt was purposely manufacturing little bits of shopping in order to detain them, and it was half past three when they got home. But Trevor had not called.

Louise was conscious of a little pang; this was how he had treated her so often in the days that were gone; so many times she had stayed at home waiting for him, or had hurried back from some engagement expecting to find him there, only to be disappointed.

"I expect he'll come to tea," she said lightly. "Or perhaps this evening when he knows father will be in."

AGATHA said nothing, but Louise knew quite well what her silence meant. Well, she must expect it—they would all be against him, of course—none of them would sympathize or understand. Not that it really mattered greatly; she and Trevor would soon be married, and that would be an end of it all.

There was a letter from Silas by the afternoon's mail.

"I shall have sailed before you get this. You don't know how happy I am at the thought of seeing you again," he wrote. "Come and meet the boat, Louise." There followed explicit details of time and date. Louise read them carelessly and threw the letter aside. If Silas had ever meant anything in her life the time was past; even the slight affection she had felt for him was forgotten; her future, about which she had been so unhappily undecided, was settled—for good or for evil now she belonged to Trevor.

Tea was brought in.

"Three cups?" Agatha asked.

"I told them to bring one for Trevor," Louise explained, but though she spoke confidently, deep down in her heart she knew that Trevor would not be there.

The evening paper came, but neither Agatha nor Louise opened it; perhaps they were both afraid.

It grew dark, and a maid came to draw the curtains.

Louise went to the piano and began to play; she played on and on—anything, everything, stumbling with many wrong notes; and Agatha sat by the fire and smoked endless cigarettes and turned the pages of a magazine without reading a word.

Then the pater came home. Louise had been listening for his step for an hour before he could possibly arrive, and she drew a quick breath of relief when she heard his customary little cough.

Was Trevor with him? Perhaps he was; perhaps he had been to the office and told him about their marriage—perhaps he had thought it better to get the inevitable scene over away from the house. She longed to rush out into the hall to see, but she sat still at the piano though her hands had fallen from the keys, and her whole body was taut as if every nerve was listening—listening.

Then the door opened and her father came in alone.

"Hullo, everybody—hullo, my dear." He went to Louise and dropped a kiss on her hair. "You're very warm and cheery in here—it's cold outside."

He stood by the fire rubbing his hands and staring up at the ceiling.

"Will you have any tea?" Agatha asked.

She always asked the same thing,

and the pater invariably replied, "Tea! —sheer poison!" But to-night he said:

"Well, I really think I will. Louise—run and tell them I'll have a cup of tea, and tell them to make it strong."

Louise looked at him. "Can't I ring the bell?" she asked very quietly, "or do you want me to go out of the room so you can tell Agatha the latest about Mercia Swindon?"

There was an uncomfortable little pause. Her father cleared his throat viciously once or twice and looked at Agatha.

Louise stood up, smiling nervously.

"You need not try to keep anything from me, dear," she said. "And whatever has happened, and whatever you say will make no difference—Trevor and I are going to be married."

HER father choked; he grew crimson in the face, and ran a finger round the inside of his collar. Finally he spluttered out, "Mad, that's what you are—stark, staring, raving mad." He turned furious eyes on his sister. "You know all about this, I suppose—you've been going behind my back all this time aiding and abetting her."

"No," Agatha answered calmly. She was used to her brother's violent attacks. "I knew nothing about it till this morning. Louise told me after you had gone to the office."

The pater walked across the room and banged the top of the piano with a heavy fist.

"Do you know what you're talking about?" he demanded of his daughter. "Do you realize what sort of a blackguard this fellow is?"

Louise answered with some spirit, "I ought to know; if I don't it's not your fault!"

He went on without heeding her.

Louise said patiently: "Don't be silly, father. He is coming here—this evening I think—to tell you what I've just told you."

The pater's anger died like magic—he even smiled, a smug little smile of infinite meaning.

"You *think* he's coming? I'm glad you realize there is an uncertainty about it," he said almost good-naturedly. "As in that case it will not be such a shock to you if he should fail to put in an appearance, will it?"

Agatha said sharply: "What do you mean? You're very cowardly to bully Louise like this—"

"It's a pity I didn't bully her more years ago," was the grim answer. "She'd have been a better daughter to me if I had. She—"

Louise left the piano and came across the room to him.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you mean by saying *if* Trevor should fail to put in an appearance?"

"If you look at the paper you will know what I mean."

Agatha stood up. "Really, Randolph—" she objected, but he cut her short.

"Kindly mind your own business, Agatha, and allow me to mind mine. I thought you at least had got Louise's interests at heart. I thought you were on my side; apparently I was mistaken. Read the paper, both of you, and see what they say about Bruce, if you don't believe me—there is a nice little paragraph carefully raking up his past life."

Louise gave a little exclamation of pain; yes, she had dreaded this.

The pater went on ruthlessly—"Co-respondent, bankrupt—two nice qualifications for my future son-in-law I must say—and he can think himself

extremely fortunate if there is not something else before long—far worse to add to the already interesting list. Well, Louise, if that is the gentleman you intend to marry, I wash my hands of you, absolutely once and for all, so you had better choose."

"I have chosen. I'm sorry, but I have chosen."

"Sorry! Yes, and you *will* be sorry, that's all I can tell you, and when you've found that my words have come true, don't come home to me whining and asking to be taken back."

"Randolph!" Agatha said again, but he went on working himself up into a fresh fury. "That's all the thanks I get for all I've done for you. Thank God your mother isn't here to see the way you've turned out; it would have broken her heart."

"I wish to God she was here," Louise said passionately. "I wish to God—" Then suddenly she broke down and ran from the room.

There was an eloquent silence which Agatha broke.

"Well," she said, "I hope you're pleased with yourself. As if the poor child hasn't had enough trouble without you bullying her like this. You ought to be ashamed."

"Ashamed! *She* is the one who ought to be ashamed. After all the advice she's had from me, all the affection and care! Calmly telling me that she chooses that—that—" Words failed him, but after a moment he broke out again. "Before *me!* She puts him before me."

Agatha said quietly, "In her place you would do exactly the same thing. She loves him."

"Love! Bah! You women make me sick. You all think far too much about love. Its importance in life is infinitesimal." He looked at his sister triumphantly. "I should have thought you, more than most women, would have had cause to realize that, Agatha."

Agatha's hands trembled . she answered.

"That's where you're wrong," she said quietly. "I'm the one who has had cause to realize—perhaps more than most women—that it's the *only* thing in life that really matters."

## CHAPTER XIV

UPSTAIRS in her room Louise stood with her hands pressed hard over her eyes, trying to keep back the storm of tears which threatened. She told herself it was silly to cry—what was there to cry about? Nothing had happened except what she had expected; her father always carried on like that when any one crossed his wishes, and then more often than not he would come round like a lamb and be sorry for all the harsh unreasonable things he had said.

Anyway, whether he was sorry or not, it would make no difference; she and Trevor would be married as soon as it could be arranged, and that would be the end of everything as far as the family were concerned—or wouldn't it? Well, she neither knew nor cared. She was sorry of course, if it meant parting in anger from her father, but her love for Trevor Bruce was so much greater than her love for any one else that it would by far outweigh her grief.

There would always be Donald, at any rate—he would stick to her and approve her actions, and he was her favorite brother; he would be glad when he knew she had gone to Trevor last night; it was he whom she had to thank that yet another tragedy had been averted. So why cry? Why feel that terrible apprehension?

And then all at once, as if some one had jerked up a blind, letting in the bright light of understanding, Louise knew.

She was afraid—afraid that somehow, in some inexplicable way, they would try to lay Mercia's death at Trevor's door.

Mercia had loved him, and he had been the last person to see her alive. For a moment she felt paralyzed with horror. Not that such a dread could ever really be justified, of course—it was too monstrous a thing, but there would always be people who would believe there was some truth in it—people who would whisper and make abominable suggestions; people who would never allow it to be forgotten that Trevor had been the cause of that recent divorce case; it would be like living in a world of whispering voices and pointing fingers.

Was that what her father had been hinting? "He can think himself extremely fortunate if there is not something else before long, far worse, to add to the already interesting list—"

That was what he had said; could he have been thinking—imagining for one moment that Trevor would ever—

And then back came the memory of Agatha's words only that morning: "She was found shot, and they think—eh, they think the poor thing was murdered."

Murdered! A hideous word—a word which one never associated with people one knew.

If only Trevor was with her; if only he had kept his word and come to face her father and tell him that he and she were to be married!

Why had he not come? Why had he not sent her word—something—anything would have been better than this terrible suspense.

Why should she have been left to bear it all? It was his place to be with her. Last night she had been so sure of him, and now— Oh, she must not allow herself to imagine they were to drift back to the old unhappy days; it was disloyal to him to permit such a thought.

And yet—but for her Bruce would have taken his life; he had said himself, "If you hadn't come in there would have been one less rotter in the world now."

Could he have contemplated such a step if he really loved her? He was no coward; he had been a brave soldier in the war, and the boys had always admired his courage above everything. Life held no terrors for Trevor, he had always laughed at misfortune and danger, and Louise knew he could have faced ruin with smiling disdain; and yet he had meant to take that way out of life. "Sick of it," he had said carelessly, but now she found herself wondering if perhaps there had been some other, graver reason.

She began to speak aloud like a frightened child trying to give itself confidence.

"Don't be a fool. You're just imagining things. What on earth are you dreaming about to believe that of Trevor—"

Every one would say he had a bad record; nobody would remember the war; nobody would remember that he was badly wounded when he was only eighteen, and had gone back again to a hell upon earth in the trenches—they would only say scornfully, "Oh, Bruce, he was always a rotter; committed every crime under the sun."

Louise felt as if some wild animal had got hold of her nerves and was rushing away with them in a cruel stampede.

Agatha's voice at the door saved her.

"Let me come in, Louise, please, dear, let me come in." Then her fingers trying the handle, and her relieved, "Oh, I thought it was locked."

She was in the room before Louise could prevent her, and had switched on the light. Louise turned on her passionately:

"Go away—you all hate him—none of you understand—go away, I don't want any of you."

"Louise, don't talk to me like that. I want to help—you must know that I want to help."

"You can't—nobody can. Besides, you're on father's side."

"I'm not. If I were I shouldn't be here now. Louise—listen to me."

"I won't. I don't want to. I only want to be left alone."

Agatha said with sudden insistence, "If you don't listen you will be sorry all your life."

Louise stood irresolute, defiant; then suddenly she gave way.

"Very well, but it won't do any good. Nothing any of you can say will make me change my mind."

"I don't want to make you change your mind. I want to tell you something"—and then as the girl did not speak, Agatha went on gently—"I want to tell you why Trevor has not been here to-day."

Louise raised her dark eyes slowly. "Well?"

"He has not been here, because the police have been questioning him about Mercia. I made your father tell me. It seems that he was the last one to see her alive. They had found a letter or something—I don't know all the facts, but apparently she was at his rooms last night."

Louise tried to say "Yes—I know," but her lips refused to form the words, and Agatha went on:

"Randolph saw Mr. Swindon to-day—of course he has been drawn into it too. Louise, do you want me to go on?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Swindon says that Trevor declares Mercia left him about seven o'clock, and that she went alone. The police have evidence that she was alive at nine and they want to know where Trevor was after she left him—if she did leave him when he says—where he was till midnight and afterward, and apparently he refuses any explanation—you know his way."

She looked pleadingly at Louise, but the girl did not speak.

"I don't want to frighten you—or to suggest anything—horrible, but you must see this is going to be very serious for Trevor unless he can prove an alibi. I had to tell you, Louise; your father forbade me to, but I had to tell you."

"You mean—they are trying to make out that Trevor killed Mercia, is that it?"

Louise spoke without flinching; she was afraid no longer.

Agatha winced. "Nobody has said so, but you see, if he won't give any explanation—if he can't—"

Louise laughed.

"If he can't, I can," she said. "You see, I was with him—in his apartment—all night."

# Daphne Learns How

*Is there a "line" guaranteed to win a man's love? Daphne decided to take her girl friend's advice—with unexpected consequences*

By Cosima Tasson

"OH, Kitty, saw you on the bus with your boy friend last night."

"Oh, did you? Well, I saw you, too—and you couldn't have slipped a sheet of carbon paper between your back and your boy friend's arm."

"Why, you mean old cat!"

"Don't talk to her, Alice! Listen to me! I met the grandest fellow Wednesday night, and I'm meeting him again to-morrow!"

"Oh, what luck!"

The joyous, foolish talk breezed

back and forth briskly in the big glassed-in room with its long rows of typewriter desks, on the fourth floor of the Star Insurance Company building.

It was a quarter to nine on a bright spring morning, and the room was rapidly filling up with the flutter of the thirty girls who earned their bread, butter and delicately perfumed powder, taking dictation and typing "yours of the —inst. received."

At a quarter to nine there were present pretty girls, fat girls, slim girls, blond girls, sloe-eyed girls, and poor girls. But all of them were sisters under the skin, pulsing with life and hope and dreams of what the future held for them.

At nine o'clock, some mean magic would change all this. Instead of girls there would be only solemn rows of typists in the big glassed-in room, tapping out millions of letters and helping shove along the world's business with all their sturdy might.

But as yet they were still girls. And girls talking together discuss only one thing, whatever the words they use may be. Smoothing hair, dabbing lipstick, teasing, laughing, serious, they talked of sweethearts, of course—past, present and future.

ONLY Daphne Davis sat quite apart from the happy groups of girls, silently idling at her desk until the time when the day's sober round would begin.

Daphne was so prim that one had to look three times to see that she really was as pretty as the prettiest girl in the whole room. Her soft brown hair, which longed to curl, was slicked severely close to her head. Demure, cream-colored lids veiled the sparkle of her big gray eyes.

She wore navy blue or gray dresses with long sleeves and round white collars. She incased the slender curves of her legs in lisle sports hose, her little feet in the kind of shoes called sensible. She rarely spoke. And she did twice as much work as any other girl. She was terribly serious about her career.

So how could any of the others have guessed that their gay talk of boy friends cut through her like a poisoned knife?

She couldn't join in the delicious chatter about sweethearts. She had no sweetheart to talk about. The thought turned the brilliant blue morning to desolate gray gloom. As she sat in her seemingly voluntary isolation, she blinked hard to keep the tears from coming.

"Every one's so happy but me," she said to herself forlornly. "And how unhappy I am!"

Especially after last night. The creaminess of her nose was still faintly pink with weeping about it. And, horror of horrors, she couldn't even think of her sacred work. A great black haze inhabited the part of her head where her gray matter was supposed to be.

For, though Daphne had no sweetheart, she was in love. Awfully, awfully in love. Thinking about it turned her heart into a heavy, hot stone that weighted down her whole being.

A great clatter interrupted her musings, as a parrot-hued chiffon dress, topped by a shock of yellow hair, catapulted into the seat next to hers.

It was Daisy Murphy, who, for a wonder, was on time. Daphne had long ago put her down as a bleached, undignified specimen of the type gentlemen prefer. Daisy retaliated with the opinion that Daphne was a wet blanket.

Daisy had hair as yellow as the heart

of the flower from which she was named. It wasn't nature's own gold, but it shone alluringly. Her skin, aided by powders and lotions galore, was as white as the petals of her name-flower. And she was as easy and careless about life as any flower of the fields.

Her chief aim seemed to be to "get by" successfully with as little labor as possible. Apparently, she was Daphne's exact opposite.

"Girls! Girls!" bubbled the exuberant Daisy. "Stop your noise, and listen to a real story. I've got something just too marvelous to tell you. Give ear to this tale—"

Bang! It was the door closing behind the Big Boss.

"Shut up, Daisy!" warned one girl. "It's him, and we've got to work."

Daisy leaned over to Daphne. Though the two girls had sat side by side for fifteen months, they had hardly talked, except to exchange the time of day or borrow erasers. Usually Daisy cared to talk to Daphne as little as Daphne cared to talk to her. But this morning she had missed the usual gossip hour, and she had a great deal on what she called her mind.

"No, I don't want to borrow your eraser."

She motioned away the object which Daphne automatically handed her. "Listen, Tongue-tied, I have to tell some one. I'm terribly in love! In fact, I'm practically engaged again. Isn't that exciting?"

Six months ago, even one month ago, Daphne would merely have pursed her lips and murmured a chilly, "Really?"

But to-day, after one desolate pang of envy, she felt a tremendous desire to listen to Daisy, to hear all about how she was in love and engaged.

"How terribly thrilling!" she said. She meant it, too.

"Yes," went on Daisy, "we're simple crazy about each other—know what I mean? He's going to go with me to-morrow at lunch time and buy me the ring. It's really serious this time." Her china-blue eyes glowed happily.

"It's just too marvelous!" Daphne returned with an involuntary surge of envy, though she felt sincerely glad for Daisy's sake—glad because of her new-found realization that she, too, was akin to all the other girls in the world. "I certainly hope you'll be happy all your life with him."

"We-ll," drawled Daisy, "I don't know about that 'all your life' stuff. But if we get over it, we can always break off, can't we? I've been engaged over and over again. It's so easy."

"Is it?" murmured Daphne wistfully.

Hitherto she had had scant respect for Daisy, with her too-gold hair and too-white skin. But now she gazed at her with a feeling that amounted to awe. Imagine being able to get a lot of men to propose to you! And she couldn't contrive so that one man should even know she existed.

"How do you do it?" she asked impulsively. Then she blushed. She'd never imagined herself saying anything so outspoken to any one.

"Tell you what," Daisy volunteered, with the generous desire of the happy to see others in the same condition, "tell you what—you and I'll have lunch together and we'll talk it all over."

"Oh, thanks, let's!" Daphne accepted.

She was surprised at herself, but she felt happier than she had felt for a long time. At last she could tell some one what had been making her so

miserable for a long time. A girl who knew such a lot about men could surely help her.

Her fingers flew industriously, but her thoughts were busy, not with the notes beside her typewriter, but with the things she was going to tell Daisy at lunch time.

THE minute Daphne had seen Sandy Renolds hunched up over a French grammar in the evening class they both attended, almost four years ago, she had liked him an awful lot.

She liked the concentration on his thin, keen face. She liked the long line of his legs, stretching down the length of three seats, that hinted at the grace that would be his when he was a grown man. And she adored the way he twisted the lock of ginger-colored hair over his forehead as he committed the grammar to memory.

But Daphne believed that boys and girls ought to be just friends—go fifty-fifty, and not flirt with each other, and never, never do anything so silly as to kiss. She believed women ought to carve out careers for themselves and never, never get sidetracked from the serious things of life by getting married too early.

She had explained all this in detail to Sandy Renolds when he asked to walk home with her that first evening of the new term. He listened with a little frown. But although he cast several wistful glances at Daphne's delicate pink cheeks, he said nothing.

She finished her talk as they sat in a café having coffee.

"You agree, don't you," said Daphne earnestly, "that boys and girls—I mean men and women—ought to treat each other like equal friends and nothing else? Don't you?"

"Of course, I do," said Sandy, just as earnestly. And he picked up her bill and tucked her books under his arm.

"That's just what I mean," flared Daphne. Angrily she snatched back her bill and demanded her books. "Here you are trying to pay for me and carry my books, as if you hadn't heard a word I said! I'm not one of those silly girls. And unless you keep my rules, we can't be friends."

Sandy stole a look at her. She certainly seemed to mean what she said, he thought.

"All right," he sighed, "I'll keep them."

For almost four years it had worked perfectly, and Daphne had known the deliciousness of real friendship that gave all and withheld nothing.

At first, of course, there were difficulties. On tramps, Sandy occasionally wanted to carry Daphne across ditches that were slippery and unsafe. He grumbled at times because, though he was getting a good salary at a bank after leaving school, Daphne wouldn't let him buy her theater tickets. And sometimes, after parties, Sandy would look at her much more as though he were wishing to kiss her dimples instead of pondering the future of the world or the other serious things they talked about.

But Daphne overcame all that. She pointed out, with some sharpness, that such nonsense would put an end to their friendship immediately; that if he didn't behave sensibly, she would never see him again. He would rebel at that, but after two or three days of sulking, he would always come round again.

And now, for the past six months, Daphne hadn't had to rebuke him once. Perfectly trained at last, Sandy kept to

to every single letter in the alphabet of their friendship contract.

"SO you see," Daphne concluded her recital to Daisy, "he's a perfect friend now."

The two girls were hunched over a tiny table in a crowded tea room, surrounded by hundreds of other girls who were busy talking, cramming precious confidences into the interval between the hours of work.

"He never even offers to pay my fare any more," Daphne went on. "I never have to scold him now about getting spoony and sentimental. Why, sometimes he doesn't even take me home after a talkie or the theater. He just says he wants to get in early because he wants to write before he goes to bed. He's going to write plays some day, you know.

"And so," she finished, "I certainly ought to be completely happy."

Daisy looked at Daphne's face and asked a perfectly needless question.

"Are you?" she inquired.

"No-o. I'm just quite wretched," said Daphne.

And, in spite of all she could do, two large tears rolled right down her nose into her lunch.

"Why are you wretched?" probed Daisy, with kind cruelty.

"Because," murmured Daphne, blushing—then, swallowing hard, she went on: "because I just can't bear to have him go walking with me for hours and not notice me any more than if I were a stick of companionable wood or something. And—and when I try to talk to him about my job, I find that instead I'm on the verge of telling him what adorable ways his hair grows—or something. And—and I don't think of my career any more. Why, I left my aunt's home for my career. She thought I ought just to stay at home and do nothing. And now I keep dreaming all the time of a dear little cottage for Sandy and me, where I'd bake his pies and make him wear his rubbers in rainy weather, and mend his shirts and—and—"

She stopped, her face as crimson as a sunset.

"I—I just go weak and funny all over when I think of him," she ended.

"I know," Daisy nodded sympathetically. "Those are the symptoms, deary. We all go through 'em. Just like the measles."

"And it's getting so difficult," Daphne mournfully confided. "I find myself quarrelling with Sandy instead of being nice to him. I—I almost hate him sometimes. Like last night—"

"Quarrelling!" Daisy broke in. "My, then it's really serious. Daphne Davis, you're in love," she accused.

Daphne felt all hot and then all cold. It sounded so—so strange when some one else actually said what she had been feeling unconsciously for months.

But it couldn't be! It mustn't be! Sandy wasn't in love with her.

"No, no," she stammered.

"Yes, yes," Daisy mimicked. She propped her elbows on the table and leaned forward.

"Now listen to me," she said earnestly. "I've been thinking of giving you some advice for a long time. You're not a bad-looking girl, but how do you expect a man to look at you if you dress like a nun and act as though you'd freeze a fellow to death if he spoke to you? You'll have to change your manner if you want this boy friend to grow fond of you.

"Men," she went on, with an air of giving generously of her own wide experience, "they like to be played up to, see? I bet, for example, you wear

the same type of clothes when you go out with a man as you do in the office."

Daphne thought guiltily of the neat row of silk dresses, all with plain straight lines, demure collars and long sleeves, which were her costumes for all except formal parties.

Daisy nodded at the unspoken confirmation of her suspicion. "Now when I go out, deary, I get myself all dolled up, and curl my hair all different from the way I generally wear it—and let 'em know it's fixed just for them. I use lots of perfume—men just love perfume. And then I play up to them. That's the big thing—play up to them. Know what I mean?"

"Not — not exactly," admitted Daphne.

"Fuss around with his tie," Daisy explained. "Tell him you love to have a great, big, protecting he-man around. Ask him what he eats for lunch. Tell him not to eat it. Call him pet names. Make him feel terribly important. And don't, for pity's sake, talk serious! I bet all you talk about is books. Instead, just talk about loving. Know what I mean? And don't forget you have to laugh at all his jokes. Laugh hard. You know—just play up. Know what I mean?"

She looked at Daphne with eager interest. Daisy mightn't know how to

*At last he was aware of her! His arm tightened*

spell Constantinople, but this subject was one she knew from A to Z, with no necessity for consulting dictionaries or encyclopedias.

"Do you really have to do that?" Daphne asked faintly. It sounded awfully—awfully undignified somehow.

"Say," Daisy stared at her, "I guess I've been engaged more times than any girl in the whole office. And I know men, from bank directors down. They all swallow the same line, hook, bait and all. If you don't play up to a man he'll never fall for you. Say, they're just born dumb. Can they help it? Flatter them, and they'll think how wonderfully smart you must be to appreciate them. And if they're slow in kissing—just kiss them first! They get the idea after awhile. Believe me, I played up to this boy of mine to get him—and I got him. And that's what you'll have to do, my dear, even if your hair *is* naturally curly.

"Well," she finished, "I've got to run, or I'd tell you some more. My boy friend said he'd ring me up at one thirty." She rose, then turned to Daphne once more with a generous smile. "Take my advice—play up to him, and—good luck!"

Impulsively she put out her hand. Daphne shook it gratefully. Daisy was was a dear, after all, she thought, in spite of her too-gold hair, her too-white skin, and her too-casual attitude toward life.

DAPHNE put on her hat and coat at five o'clock and walked out into the street in a maze of thought.

Of course, she couldn't take Daisy's advice seriously, she told herself. She wasn't that sort of girl. She was a frank pal, not a silly feminine creature, a wheedling hypocrite.

And equally, of course, she only wanted Sandy to be her good friend. When they met to-morrow she'd beg his pardon for being so cross last night, and give him the money to buy her a ticket for the concert they planned to go to next week, and ask him about the book—

She stopped short, right in the middle of the five o'clock hordes rushing to the subway.

"Daphne Davis, you're a hypocrite right now," she told herself stonily. "You know you'd just die if you had to go on going out with Sandy in the same calm, humdrum way. You know you'd jump for joy if he brought you flowers, and you'll simply die if he doesn't take you home from the theater, and kill him if he doesn't kiss you! And what are you going to do about it?"

The first thing she did was to look in her purse and see how much money she had. Then she dived down into the subway and rode to Times Square.

The dress shop fortunately kept open until six thirty, for it carried a special line of dresses that were attractive to well-bred, conservative business girls.

"Miss Davis," Miss Murphy, Daphne's favorite assistant, greeted her, "how lucky you came in! I was going to phone you to-morrow and tell you we have a little sample dress of the type you like so much—navy silk, with a little lace collar and those full, long sleeves. Just a sweet little dress. And so reasonable, too."

"I don't want to see it," said Daphne determinedly. "Show me some of your chiffon evening gowns, won't you?"

The assistant, after a puzzled glance, obediently went to one of the racks at the other end of the room and disclosed a row of flower-colored, frilly frocks.

"These are the only chiffons we

have," she said dubiously. "Rather extreme models. All French, you know. Besides," she added, in a low tone, "they're rather expensive."

Daphne fingered their brilliant loveliness.

"How about this little beige model?" suggested the saleswoman, slipping it from its hanger. "It's quite a modest little frock—something in the style you're accustomed to."

Daphne pointed to a flame affair, with irregular, floating panels.

"I'll try that one on," she announced.

The brilliant-hued bodice was molded closed to the body. Only a figure with slender, rounded lines could have stood it. Daphne discovered, to her surprise, that she had such lines. The neckline was slashed down at one side in front, and to a point far below the shoulder-blades at the back. The skirt rippled and flowed in subtle lines, like a many petalled flower, in shades of orange and flame. A large flower was stitched flat against one hip.

As Miss Murphy had said, it was quite extreme.

But it made Daphne's throat and arms look creamier than ever, and brought out altogether unsuspected violet depths in her gray eyes. It made her feel as wicked and daring as a countess in a film.

"I'll take it," she declared. "How much is it?"

This was a reversal of the usual formula, which invariably put the price first.

The dress was pretty expensive, but Daphne didn't even pale.

"My dear, it positively transforms you," Miss Murphy said in a burst of enthusiasm. "You look so—so Paris," she ended vaguely, and bustled off to pack the frock.

The next hour and a half was a mad rush for Daphne. Up and down Broadway she hurried.

A pair of flame satin slippers, with delicately curved, impossible slender heels. Stockings the color of moonbeams and the weight of a cobweb. A set of gossamer undies, to go with the frock.

Later, in a hairdresser's shop, a heady, exquisite perfume was dispensed to Daphne. She was initiated into the use of a special evening cream, and took her first lesson in applying eyeshadow and in shaping her lips even more alluringly than nature had.

After that she was enveloped in a huge sheet and told to shut her eyes while the hair across her forehead was clipped. When she opened them again she stared at a new Daphne. A Daphne whose curly locks really looked windblown by a civilized and coquettish wind. A Daphne who looked as if she had all the arts of fascination at her fingertips and practiced them twenty-four hours out of twenty-four.

What a difference a few hairs, properly snipped, can make!

"Delightful!" said the barber, who was devoted to his art. "I could cut mamselle's hair for nossing, she look so lovely."

Daphne stared and stared at herself.

"It isn't me at all, it's some one else instead," she murmured to the mirror. But deep inside, she knew it was she, that other, all-feminine Daphne who had never been allowed to be herself in public, because of the every-day Daphne.

"You're going to get your innings now," said Daphne seriously to the girl in the mirror. "And, remember, you have to play up."

Her brown curls shone with a new, coppery glint. The dimples about her

mouth twinkled in and out. And, amazingly, one shadowed eyelid winked saucily over one sparkling eye.

"Don't worry about me," the reflection seemed to say. "I'm a saucy girl, and I know what I'm about!"

IT was lucky for Daphne that she hadn't much work to do the next day. She carefully slicked back her clipped curls for business and even refrained from powdering her nose, but she felt so different and strange inside, she was sure it must show somehow.

Daisy wasn't there. She had been sent to another department for the day. Daphne was glad. She felt she would have blushed furiously if she'd had to face Daisy's knowing grin.

It took her more than an hour to dress that night, but it was worth it.

"I look the part, even if I don't feel it," she told herself a bit grimly when the finishing touches had been added.

Coppery, cutely disheveled curls, exquisitely reddened lips, creamy-skinned arms, floating draperies, exotic huge flower and flame-tipped feet—all together they spelled indubitably, conscious, irresistible, feminine allure.

Daphne dropped perfume behind her ears, rubbed the stopper along her eyebrows and down her white arms, and wondered dazedly if only that morning she had worn a straight navy blue jumper dress with round white collar, and meekly kept her eyes lowered while Mr. Smythe pompously intoned his dictation.

Then the bell rang and she forgot everything but the panic that gripped her. What if Sandy should notice how different she looked? What if he shouldn't?

"Hurry, or we won't be in time," he called from the hall below. "What's keeping you?"

She tucked a lacy handkerchief in her little evening bag, hastily enveloped her white shoulders and flame draperies in her concealing black velvet cape and, with a little prayer on her lips, went down to meet him.

They decided to walk, since it was such a nice, mild evening and the theater was only a little distance away.

Daphne was glad. Her flame slippers would have been conspicuous in the bus or subway. They were plainly inconspicuous here, for Sandy hadn't noticed them or anything else different about her, it seemed.

"Look here, you've forgotten your hat, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Daphne meekly. "I thought I'd wear evening dress when you phoned you were getting orchestra seats because the balcony was sold out."

"Well, let's hope you don't catch cold," Sandy returned, quite as if her uncovered head were slick and demure as usual, not tantalizingly ruffled with curls in the wind.

"I never catch cold," Daphne said forlornly.

Then she remembered that she should at least have added something about being with a great big wonderful man who wouldn't let her catch cold!

Little thrills ran down her spine as she slipped out of her cape in the brightly lit theater. Now her secret was out, and Sandy would know that she was a different Daphne from the one who wanted to be just a good friend!

BUT Sandy apparently hadn't noticed she was taking off her cape even enough to help her with it! He buried his nose in the program as soon as he sat down, because he wanted

to make sure that his favorite actor was playing in the piece. And he kept on reading the program notes steadily.

Daphne couldn't bear it.

"How do you like my new dress?" She managed to say it brightly, though inwardly she was atremble. "It's special—it's a special dress."

She had meant to say: "It's specially for you," but her tongue somehow baulked at the words.

Sandy looked at her gravely.

"You look different," he acknowledged, and turned back to the program.

Daphne could have killed him. She bit her lower lip hard and gazed at the rising curtain with tear-dimmed, unseeing eyes.

"I'll show him!" she vowed, twisting her handkerchief into shreds.

What she'd show him she didn't quite know. But something, somehow!

And yet the first act ended, and Sandy, calm and coolly friendly, remained unshown. Quite as if Daphne's lovely throat were incased in a prudish little round collar, as if her eyes were bits of inanimate agate, he leaned comfortably back in his seat during the first interval and devoted the time to a very earnest discussion of the play's construction.

That was what they always did, of course—talked about the play. Because Sandy had real ideas about playwriting. He was writing a play himself. Besides, that was why one went to the theater with friends, wasn't it?

The old Daphne had loved these discussions. The new Daphne would have, too, if, so to speak, she had first felt properly recognized. As it was, she mumbled a few monosyllables and sat like a perfect stick.

"Don't you feel well?" Sandy stopped to ask. "You're so quiet."

"I feel marvelous," she assured him indignantly.

And when the house went dark again and conversation stopped, she wondered miserably if she looked so perfectly awful that he thought she was sick.

His arm was lying along the arm of her chair. She longed to let her fingers creep into his. It was so sweet to be near him. Once she thought she saw his hand move toward hers. But as she watched breathlessly it moved away again.

When the lights went up once more, Daphne rose determinedly. She wasn't going to endure Sandy's maddening calm any longer.

"Let's go out into the foyer and get some fresh air," she said.

She got a thrilling sensation from seeing how men's heads swung round to watch her fluttering flame draperies go by. That gave her courage to sway at just the right angle on her slender stilts of heels and to glance provocatively once or twice at Sandy as he stood quietly in a corner, puffing at his cigarette.

Back in their seats in the darkened theater, however, Sandy gave no intimation of having been stirred by the sight of her charm and her power over other men. In fact, this time he folded his hands in his lap and never allowed them to stray within a yard of hers.

"Telling some one to play up is all right," thought Daphne dolefully, "but you can't exactly reach out and grab a man around the neck to let him know you like him."

As she wrapped her cape about her once more, standing out on the curb in front of the theater, she wished she could run home and have a good cry. It had been terrible.

But when Sandy said:

"I suppose you want to run along home now, so's to get lots of sleep before going to work to-morrow," she hastily interrupted him.

"Oh, no, I'm dying to go somewhere and dance. Do let's!"

In a flare her courage leaped up again. She was going to see this thing through! Her breath came quicker, her cheeks glowed with color that came out of no rouge-pot.

She would, she would, she would make him realize that she was a girl, and a girl to be made love to!

It was in this mood that she swept into Sandy's arms as the orchestra of the restaurant launched into a slow, languorous fox trot.

"I love to dance, Sandy," she murmured, "with you." And she lifted her long lashes to gaze ardently into his steady dark eyes.

For a second he looked puzzled. Then his eyes warmed to hers.

"You do?" he whispered.

A tiny thrill of coming victory ran through Daphne's veins. At last! She was on the right track!

"Just you," she said, and tucked her curls close against his shoulder as she cuddled nearer.

Then she hated herself, somehow. But before she could analyze her conflicting emotions, she felt Sandy's arm pressing her intolerably, deliciously close to him. It hurt, but it was grand. She remembered her rôle.

"You're hurting me," she pouted, dimpling, "you great, big strong man, you!"

Sandy smiled back in answer, a dizzied, delighted smile.

"Am I?" he whispered. "Well, I don't want you to get away." A minute later he asked: "What's that perfume you use?"

"'Care for Me'," she said with a wicked blink of her eyelashes.

"It's heady," said Sandy.

When they got back to their table, Daphne felt that everything, somehow, was changed. And that Sandy was changed.

For when, instead of making a halfway intelligent remark, she cooed: "Oooh, how I love your tie! Pretty, pretty!" he didn't look disgusted. He grinned fatuously, and said:

"Do you?"

Then he gave her a long, long look—a look that frightened her as well as thrilled her. It made her want to run—if he ran after.

"Let me fix pretty tie," she baby-talked. "Wanna fix Sandy's pretty tie."

She stretched out her white arms and rosy-tipped fingers across the table, drew his head close to hers, and pulled and patted at his tie until it resembled the last remnant on a bargain counter.

"Gee, you fixed it just swell, all right," said Sandy as he surveyed the mess.

"Big man needs little girl to look after him," said Daphne, bringing her battery of dimples up to the front line of attack. "What did the poor big working-man have for lunch?"

"Cheese sandwich and apple-pie," said Sandy.

"You mustn't eat pie for lunch; it's bad for any one who uses his brain as much as you do," gurgled Daphne, leaning over and patting his cheeks in mock rebuke. "Promise you'll never eat pie for lunch again. Promise!"

"You bet," said Sandy, with a grin of delight that threatened to make the corners of his mouth meet behind. "It's terribly sweet of you to take so much personal interest in me."

"Must take interest in a great, big,

handsome, clever man," murmured Daphne. "Big, clever man who's going to write plays."

"Say, Daffy, what did you think of that last act, by the way? A little weak, wasn't it, toward the end? I thought—"

"Let's dance, let's dance," interrupted Daphne, clapping her hands and springing to her feet.

She held out her arms and let him sweep her into the rhythm of the music.

SHE was glad to be dancing for two reasons.

First, she didn't dare let the conversation drift back to its old topics. Secondly, it was so devastatingly delightful to be held in Sandy's arms.

Oh, how she loved him! Even when a little imp inside her head stood off and contemptuously watched how successfully all her little tricks were working on this supposed clever male, she couldn't help feeling the delicious excitement of their effect.

And so, curls rumpled, lips redder and more alluring than ever, Daphne flirted, sighed and danced on flame-tipped feet through the hours, and knew that Sandy followed hotly after.

"And now, and now—" said Daphne to herself. But she didn't dare imagine what would happen next. The new, reckless Daphne didn't care.

"We must go," she said to Sandy, reluctantly, breaking the spell of a dreamy dance.

Sandy pressed her closer and shook his head. All his reasonableness of the past six months was gone. He was once more the rebellious Sandy.

"We must," said Daphne firmly. She had to be firm, because she wished they could stay like this for ever.

Sandy looked at her with dazzled eyes. "I want to dance with you all night, all night!" he whispered, touching her ear with his lips, just not kissing it.

Daphne managed to shake her head, in spite of the spell that seemed cast upon her.

"How easy it is!" she thought irrelevantly, looking at the adoring man who just that morning had been only a good friend. He was putting her cape around her shoulders with the tender fingers of a lover. But the moment of reflection passed in a wave of emotion. No matter what, she loved his being that way.

The cool night air seemed to do something to Sandy, however. Once more his voice held that hatefully crisp, calm note.

"Shall we walk?" he inquired matter of factly.

"I want a taxi. So tired!" pouted Daphne, quickly sliding into her little-girl-protected-by-a-great-big-man attitude. Evidently it was still needed.

Obediently, Sandy hailed a cab. He helped her in politely, then scrunched against the opposite corner.

Again that mixture of hate and longing rose unbearably in Daphne's heart. How dare he—how dare he ignore her like that? He was being just a friend again. A huge lump of misery clogged her throat. She swallowed it determinedly. She'd give Daisy's tactics a last trial.

"Sandy," she murmured, sliding along the seat, close up to him. "Sandy—"

She put her head on his shoulder.

"Sandy," she said again, "kiss me." And she lifted her lips to his.

Daphne never knew kisses could be like that. She came out of a mist of delight to hear Sandy whispering over and over, as he held her crushed against him:

"Oh, my darling, darling, I love you, I—"

WITH a twist of her whole body, Daphne wrenched herself from his arms.

"And I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!" she sobbed brokenly.

She seemed drowning in a flood of misery. Then it broke into a storm of tears and words.

"It isn't the real me you've fallen in love with! It's just a cheap, horrid mask—just a girl who makes you think she thinks you're the most wonderful man on earth, and flirts with you, and dresses up for you and—and plays up to you!

"You've known the real me for years, and yet you haven't wanted to kiss me. You're not in love with the real me! I just tricked you into saying it, that's all! And I hate you, I hate you, I—"

Sandy closed her mouth with a kiss and folded her so firmly in his arms that she stopped breathing.

"Listen to me, Daffy, dear," he said. "I saw through every one of your tricks. In any other girl, I'd have thought them stupid. And I think you're just as pretty in your business dresses as you are in this outfit—though I think you're an angel in it, too. Daffy, I'd think you were pretty if you wore sackcloth and ashes."

Daphne blinked the tears away from her lashes.

"Then why—why didn't you ever tell me before that you loved me?"

"Because," the boy interrupted, "I was always scared to death that if I tried to make love to you, you'd never talk to me again, you darling little goose. For the past six months I'd given up the idea that you'd ever care for me, except as a friend. And don't you suppose a man has pride, too? Even to-night, I wasn't sure why you were different. And then I saw that you couldn't be such a darling little idiot unless—it was because you care, wasn't it?" he interrupted himself with a note of fear.

Daphne let her kiss speak for her.

Later, after Sandy had settled her comfortably in his arms and told the driver to go around the square again, he pulled the tiny curl above her left ear.

"But wherever," he inquired, "did you learn all those dumb stunts, like fussing with my tie—Lord, how I hate to have my tie messed up—and cooing like a squeaking doll?"

Daphne opened her mouth to confess. Then she closed it. After all, she wasn't going to betray another girl's trade secrets!

And besides, it was much better to keep her mouth closed, because Sandy was kissing it.

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## A TREAT!

**Remember the cover of the May 3rd issue of ALL-STORY?**

**Judging by the number of requests for free copies that we have received, readers loved it.**

**The June 28th issue will have an even lovelier picture, and a copy of this, too, will be sent free to any reader sending in the coupon from that issue.**

**Beginning with the June 28th issue, each cover of the magazine will tell a story. Betty-Lou, a heroine you'll love, will have many romantic adventures on her summer vacation, and each cover will picture one of these.**

**And, best of all, you may get one or all of these pictures free!**

**Remember the date—beginning June 28th—and don't miss the first one!**

# His Hired Fiancée

*Paid to keep all girls away from the man she loved! But — she too must forego his love*

By
Ernest Haines

*Suddenly Ned said: "Why not marry her over here à la Tunney?"*

THE volley of knocks on Gail Sinclair's door thundered in her dreams and roused her to a sudden wakefulness that made her heart beat a wild tattoo against her ribs. Another day, she thought—another terrible, hopeless, devastating day! Tons of lead seemed anchored to her soul, filling her with a hopelessness that the dull light from the court window only accentuated.

Another succession of knocks brought her to an alert sitting position. She stepped quickly out of bed, threw her flimsy pale blue wrapper about her, and pattered anxiously to the door.

"Yes?" she said meekly.

"Mornin', Miss Sinclair. Could I be talkin' to you a moment?"

"Of course! Come in."

Gail unlocked the door and opened it to admit the two hundred pounds of native Irish that was her landlady.

"Sure and you'll pardon me for comin' up at this hour of the mornin'," began Mrs. Fogarty, as she puffed her way into the dingy little room, "but I did want to speak with you before you started to work."

"Perfectly all right," murmured Gail feverishly, casting about in her mind for the proper answer to what was to come.

"Y' see," continued Mrs. Fogarty, "what with the laundry bein' very high this week, and me havin' all the windows washed, and the taxes comin' due, and..."

"Of course," Gail interrupted. "Of course! How long is it now, Mrs. Fogarty?"

"Three weeks yesterday," said the woman, almost apologetically. "Y' see, it isn't as if you didn't have a job—"

"My brother—" Gail interposed gently.

Mrs. Fogarty was a study in patience and sympathy.

"Of course—your brother. H-m! How much longer d'you think he'll be stayin' in the hospital, Miss Sinclair?"

"They don't know. Maybe months. Maybe—years."

"The war was a terrible thing," Mrs. Fogarty remarked with a ponderous sigh.

Gail shuddered and rose suddenly from her rickety chair.

"Mrs. Fogarty," she said, her lovely, capable little shoulders thrown back proudly, "don't you worry. I'll fix it all right. I'll pay for two weeks, at least, by the end of the week—at the latest."

The Irishwoman allowed a grunt to escape—a grunt born of long experience with lovely little boarders in pale blue wrappers who promised to pay by the end of the week—at the latest.

"I was thinkin'," she said, "that perhaps — well, Mrs. Polatski up the street has rooms at—" the landlady burbled on with her subtle dispossess.

Gail's mind raced wildly. She must hurry and dress. She must get to the hospital before she rushed to the Hotel Beauty Shoppe. Jack—poor dear Jack—would be so disappointed if he didn't see her for a moment, at least.

Also, she must placate this woman. Starting out anew in some other boarding house with a week's rent to be paid in advance would be impossible.

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Fogarty," she broke in desperately. "Just a few more days—just a few more days!"

Mrs. Fogarty seemed far from happy.

"You'd better be hurryin' now, Miss Sinclair," she said at last, "or you won't be gettin' any breakfast."

The visitor left with ill disguised dissatisfaction. Gail slipped into her clothes, ran down three flights to the large, bare dining room, took a few mouthfuls of a dry, tasteless orange, gulped a cup of black coffee, and hurried out into the balmy spring air.

THIS was a day when one could be happy, if one had reason for happiness, thought Gail; but her depression had lasted for so many days that she had almost become used to it. Something—something must happen at last to ease her mind of this perpetual worry and anxiety; and today, she tried to tell herself, must be *the* day.

She had tried to tell herself that every morning for weeks; and always it had been the same thing—hiding her worry from Jack at the hospital, rushing to the beauty shop to work on irritable, chattering dowagers, hurrying

back to the hospital to cheer Jack again after the long, tiring day; then home for the brief benediction of sleep—if, indeed, sleep would come. Each morning it began again, with no solution in sight.

As she hurried along the crowded uptown street she told herself that Jack must never know what she had been through — never, never, never! She must let him go on thinking that there was still plenty left of the two-thousand-dollar legacy their father had left her, and something of the similar amount that Jack had inherited two and a half years ago. It would make his life even more miserable to know that her slaving at the beauty parlor didn't half pay for his appalling hospital bills and the hundred and one little expenses that cropped up relentlessly day after day.

No, Jack mustn't learn the truth. He was so devilishly sweet, so anxious that his sister should be happy. Heaven knew he had suffered enough, lying there in the hospital day after day with his tortured lung, without her making things worse for him.

Anybody would understand that war gas had caused his illness; but there had also been that accident out in those Colorado mines, which complicated the situation.

Gail couldn't bear to have him treated in less than the best possible way she could afford. *Afford?* Why, there were two other men in his little room, and yet she was going along running up this debt and that debt, with all of both their legacies gone.

All the way down town in the Elevated she tortured her mind with wonderings and worry. If only she could get a break of luck! If only she could have a chance to develop her talents! No, the best she could hope for would be the job of manager in her shop, and that was not to be counted on for the near future.

Standing before the great doorway of the hospital, Gail stopped.

"I must pull myself together," she said aloud. "I must pull myself together." She squared her shoulders and pulled down the coat of her modest blue ensemble. "Jack mustn't know. Jack mustn't know."

JACK greeted her with a happy smile.

"Hello, honey!" he remarked cheerily. "Gee, you're a peach to come!"

Every morning he said something like that, never taking her visit for granted. She leaned over and kissed his forehead, where his tousled blond hair curled impudently.

"Morning, darling," she replied. "How're tricks to-day?"

"Grand!" he said.

That was what he told her every morning, even though his sunken cheeks and the heavy lines under his eyes silently testified that he had suffered pitifully during the night.

"You look fine," she declared, as she sat down on the bed and took his hand.

"Baby, *you* look like a million dollars!" he returned, his eyes admiring her trim get-up.

She squeezed his hand.

"And that's how I feel," she smiled cheerily.

Despite herself, she dropped her eyes. For a moment he looked perplexed.

"Honey," he said, "you're—you're sure everything is jake?"

She looked him straight in the face.

"Sure! Why, of course, darling! What could be wrong?"

"Just wondered. You ought to have a vacation, baby."

She pooh-poohed the idea quickly.

"One of these days, Jack boy. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't have the job."

"Gail," he said suddenly.

"Yes?"

"Gail, I've been thinking. I—well, you've been working so hard. You—gee, honey, I had a speech all planned, but I guess it's all off. Gail, I've got a present for you."

"A present?"

His clear blue eyes were twinkling now.

"Just a little thing," he murmured. "I wanted you to have it because—well, just because. The nurse got it for me."

"You sweet, sweet person!" was all Gail could say.

From under his pillow he pulled a little box.

"Here," he said, leaning forward from his propped-up pillow to kiss her soft cheek lightly.

Forcing back her tears, Gail pulled the pink tissue from the little box. She opened it quickly, and gasped. Within it was a dainty white-gold ring with a perfect little sapphire that blinked at her happily in the sunlight.

"Jack!" she managed. "Oh, Jack!"

The inner rim was engraved with the legend:

To G. FROM J.

"'To G. from J.,'" she read in a low voice. "You darling, darling boy!"

He looked up at her shamefacedly.

"Baby, I'll have to ask you," he began, "the next time you come—well, would you mind drawing a little amount from my account to pay Miss Stivers? She's the nurse."

"Of course not, Jack. Glad to do it. How—how much shall I draw?"

"Better make it fifty," he said blithely. "That'll cover it."

He seemed embarrassed at having to admit the earthly value of his token.

"O. K., sweet," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, while her mind did somersaults wildly. "Now I've got to tear, Jack. Be a good boy, now; and don't forget you can call me at the shop if you need me any time."

"I won't," he said, as she leaned over to kiss him.

"A million, billion thanks," she breathed into his ear. "It's absolutely beautiful!"

"Glad you like it, honey," he said happily.

Then she was gone.

MRS. WILLOUGHBY, Gail had always thought, was her nicest customer. Haughty, cool, and superior she seemed indeed; but that was only before you came to know her. It developed that one could really talk to her, frankly and sincerely. Other customers required a certain reserve on the part of the operator; otherwise, they might take offense and make things miserable for her.

But this morning Gail was in no mood to talk to any one, not even the understanding Mrs. Willoughby. This, she decided, was the worst day of her life.

It never rains but it pours. On the way out of the hospital, the girl at the desk had asked her to step in to see the matron. The matron had been kind but firm. The bill must be paid, or her brother would have to be sent to the charity ward; and even that would take time. Yes, the matron had concluded, Gail had better negotiate a loan and pay the bill, or—

"Or—" Everything, now, was "or—"

Poor, dear Jack! Such a sweet thought, and yet so improvident! How should he know, though, that their little funds were exhausted?

Really, she was glad she had never given way to temptation and told him the true state of affairs. He managed to be so happy with so little to be happy about.

She must say something, Gail thought, as she worked over Mrs. Willoughby's patrician nails. But now the older woman was speaking and Gail listened.

"Miss Sinclair," she said, "will you be good enough to move that light a little farther back?"

Other women, sitting under the drying machine that followed the finger wave, spoke irritably, angrily, as if the operator had invented the devilish contraption; but not Mrs. Willoughby. She was courteous, kind, calm, about everything.

"Certainly," Gail said, rising from her chair. As she carried out the woman's request, she managed to chatter: "We won't be seeing you for some time, then, will we? I do envy you, going abroad at this season. In a month or so it 'll be unbearably hot here, won't it?"

"Italy," said Mrs. Willoughby dryly, "is the hottest place next to Hades in summer; but I shall enjoy it, of course. I always enjoy Italy. And then Ned—he's my son—Ned likes it, too, even though it's pretty strenuous for him."

Mrs. Willoughby had spoken often of Ned, and Gail had read about him in the newspapers several times, after his mother had called her attention to an article concerning him. He was a successful young pianist, better known abroad, it seemed, than in his native country.

"It's his first formal tour, you see. A lot depends on it."

"I see," said Gail, thinking how glorious it would be for Jack to have an ocean voyage and a few months in the Alps or on the Italian lakes.

MRS. WILLOUGHBY was regarding her steadfastly.

"You are not very happy this morning, my dear, are you?" she said quietly.

With any one but Mrs. Willoughby, Gail would have equivocated.

"No," she confessed, smiling faintly, as she took the woman's hand into hers to continue the manicure. "No, I'm not."

"Your brother isn't better?"

How sweet of her to remember!

"He's doing well," declared Gail. "I'm just worried."

"I know," said Mrs. Willoughby calmly. "Money."

"Yes," Gail answered frankly.

"Well," said the woman philosophically, "we all have worries."

"You have — worries?" inquired Gail incredulously.

Mrs. Willoughby smiled.

"No—not money; but I suppose my worries seem as bad to me as yours seem to you."

They were silent for a few moments. Then the older woman continued:

"My dear, don't you realize that you're—well, too good for this? It's a fine position, but you have taste, refinement, natural grace. Why don't you consider something else—buying, perhaps?"

"Perhaps, some day," Gail replied modestly; "but I suppose I'm better at this than I am at anything else."

"One couldn't ask for a better operator."

"Thank you."

Another pause. Then Mrs. Willoughby spoke again.

"Miss Sinclair, I'm going to tell you something interesting about my son. You'll hardly believe it, but Ned is so horribly pursued by girls, because of his fame, his fortune, and his good looks, that the boy finds it almost impossible to work."

"That," asked Gail quietly, "is your worry?"

"Yes," Mrs. Willoughby answered.

"Too bad he can't get married," Gail suggested. "That would rather settle them."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Willoughby. "At any rate, you think in the same channels that we do."

"We?"

"Ned and I."

"Oh, really?"

After the manicure and wave were finished, Mrs. Willoughby said to Gail in a low voice:

"I wish—I wish you'd come upstairs at noon for a few minutes, my dear. I live right here in the hotel. I think it would be worth your while."

Gail looked at her intently. Did this casual invitation hold the answer to her problems?

"I'll be up," she said quietly.

THE moment Gail Sinclair saw the kind, earnest face of Ned Willoughby, something strange happened inside her. As the maid let her into the sumptuously decorated suite, he was at the piano playing a Chopin prelude. When his mother came hurrying out of the next room, he rose gracefully and turned a charming, welcoming smile on Gail.

"How do you do, Miss Sinclair?" Mrs. Willoughby said graciously. "This is my son, Ned."

He came toward the caller, his hand outstretched. Everything about him, Gail decided, was perfect, from his exquisitely tailored suit of unfinished worsted to his ingenuous, open, clean-shaven face.

Gail took his large hand into hers, and then withdrew hers quickly. She was a little ashamed of the tempestuous thrill that coursed through her at the touch of his strong, slender fingers.

He was looking down at her, smiling pleasantly.

"Mother," he said, without turning his face away from Gail, "as usual, your taste is perfect."

Gail was perplexed.

"Sit down, my dear," said Mrs. Willoughby, in answer to her questioning look. Each formed a corner of a businesslike triangle. "Let us get right down to business, as they say. I told you in the shop to-day that my son is a pianist, and this summer he has an important tour in Europe. He must practice continually, and we are taking a piano for him in our boat suite. As I also told you this morning, Miss Sinclair," she continued, "Ned is very much sought after by young women."

"Need we go into that?" Ned Willoughby interrupted quietly.

"No, we needn't. I think you will understand, my dear. We have thought about it a great deal. The only way out is for my son to have a *fiancée*. Since he has none, we must find one for him. We must find him—shall we say a bumper? Miss Sinclair, clearly you have charm, refinement, tact. I think you will enjoy the trip; and, what is more, it will be well worth your while." Mrs. Willoughby turned an ingratiating smile on Gail. "Would

you—would you be willing to be his—bumper?"

Gail Sinclair was the picture of bewilderment. She tried hard to assume the calm manner of her hosts, and failed.

Ned Willoughby had risen and was standing over her, trying to put her at her ease with an understanding grin.

"Miss Sinclair," he laughed, "I think mother has chosen admirably. Will you—will you be my *fiancée?*"

Gail's cheeks dimpled with amusement.

"This is so sudden," she replied lightly. Then, seriously, "I'll have to think it over."

"I'm afraid there's not much time," Ned told her. "You see, we're sailing to-night, at midnight. You'll have to decide very soon."

Mrs. Willoughby was speaking now, softly, persuasively.

"Of course," she said, "all your expenses will be paid. As for remuneration, you shall have five hundred dollars right now and another five hundred when we return three months from now."

*Her grip on Gail's arm was strong. "I warn you," she said. "And I always get what I want!"*

FIVE hundred dollars! To-day *was* Gail's day. Five hundred dollars would take care of everything—all the worries that had turned her life

into a perpetual state of anxiety. All the things Jack needed—Jack! Would he object to her making such an arrangement? It would be hard to explain it to him.

Suddenly Gail saw it all clearly.

"Yes," she said quickly. "I'll go."

Late that afternoon Jack gasped at sight of the vision in blue before him. Gail, dressed in a dainty affair in chiffon, was breathless with excitement.

"Do you like it, darling? I bought it this afternoon. Oh, Jack, I have such thrilling news!'

"What is it, baby—and how do you happen to be out buying dresses in the afternoon?"

"Jack, I left my job at noon."

"Left your—"

"Remember what you said about a vacation, honey? Well, I got the chance, and I'm going to take it."

The young fellow with tousled blond hair on the bed tried to hide the sudden sense of impending loneliness that swept over him.

"Gee!" he said. "That's glorious!"

"It *is* glorious! To Italy, darling—imagine! A Mrs. Willoughby came into the shop this morning and sprang it on me. Wants me to go as—as companion."

"Grand!" was all he could say.

"Sweet, I hate to leave you so; but I was so disappointed about that trip last year, with my passport made out and all. It 'll be a real lark! I'm leaving to-night."

"Grand!" he repeated.

Gail spoke quickly, eagerly, to keep from crying. She laughed, took her brother's hand, pushed the hair from out of his eyes, kissed him. She held up the sapphire ring.

"It's just marvelous, darling. I'll wear it and think of you every minute. And before I forget—"

She gave him a roll of bills.

"You'll be needing it," she said. "I drew it out of your account, so that you wouldn't have to worry. They'll take care of it downstairs for you. Everything is arranged."

THE hurrying, excited crowd confused and thrilled Gail. Everybody was jostling everybody else. Everywhere there were farewells—tearful, joyful, drunken, careless farewells.

Hustling stewards were rushing baggage to staterooms packed with flowers, fruit, packages. The first whistle had sounded to tell visitors that their time was up.

Gail had been thrilled by the luxurious suite engaged by the Willoughbys; amazed and chagrined at the thousand tokens of affection and admiration, most of them addressed to "Mr. Edward Willoughby." Could one man have so many friends, so many admirers? Oh, to be really the *fiancée* of such a man!

She shuddered at the hollowness and mockery of her position, although Mr. Willoughby had been so sweet every minute—so very, very sweet.

For one brief moment, as she stood beside him on the deck after they had come upstairs again, she had almost lost herself in fantasy, dreaming that she was really his and he hers.

But now the pianist had stepped away from Gail and his mother to do justice to the many young girls and dapper fellows that swarmed about him. He was talking to a tall, sinuous blonde, who smiled eagerly at him from under a large picture hat. Gail could not help overhearing their conversation.

"That's very nice of you, Estelle," he was saying.

"We'll have a glorious time, my dear," she answered.

"We? Why—"

"Ned, didn't you know? I'm sailing to-night, too."

"Sailing to-night!" For a moment he seemed to have lost his composure. "Well, how nice!" he said at length, but his tone lacked conviction.

When the girl made her announcement, Gail detected an involuntary change in Mrs. Willoughby's demeanor—a gasp, quickened breathing, nothing more. Almost immediately Ned's mother recovered her poise and regarded the feverish crowd with apparent unconcern.

The blond girl was standing very close to young Willoughby, her long, tapering fingers touching his sleeve.

"I told you, Ned," she breathed. "I warned you I wouldn't let you get away from me!"

In that moment the former manicurist realized she had met her first real enemy. Gail hated the woman for being a danger to the man whom, in so brief a time, she suddenly realized she had learned to love with all her heart!

THEY stood on the boat deck, Gail and Ned. The ship had been out of port less than an hour, and sleep was impossible on such a glorious spring night. For a long while they leaned against the rail, saying nothing, their hair blown by a warm wind that swept the ocean.

"Gail," said Ned suddenly. The girl's heart seemed to skip a beat as she heard him call her by her Christian name for the first time. "You—er—don't mind my calling you Gail?"

She shook her head, smiling faintly.

"Gail, then, I have to tell you this—how much we—how much I appreciate your undertaking this thing. Oh, look at those lights over there—the last of the shore we'll see for some time."

His enthusiasm was so boyish, so different from his usual debonair sophistication.

"Fireflies," she said.

"Or stars hanging over the water."

Again silence, but this time a silence with a little less coldness, a little more understanding.

"I wish music could express that," he said wistfully.

"It can," she replied. "Debussy does it."

He turned a quick glance in her direction.

"Another miracle," he murmured. "Yes, Debussy. I hope to do it, too, some day."

"You will," she assured him earnestly.

They watched the spray foam and seethe beneath them, lit by the lights of the great liner. Out beyond, the moon was throwing silver patches on the dark water. Ned seemed to have pulled himself together, seemed to be repressing what that glorious moment called forth; but Gail couldn't be any too sure.

He pulled a little box from his pocket and opened it. A solitaire sparkled before her in the moonlight. Ned Willoughby appeared embarrassed for the first time, and in Gail's heart a lump of lead seemed to be growing.

"You know," he said casually, "you'll have to—er—wear this."

"A proposal *de luxe*," she laughed.

He took her hand and started to put the ring on her finger. The tiny sapphire caught his eye. He gasped.

"I can't have you wearing another man's ring." He was trying to joke, but underneath his laughing tone there

was a definite hint of seriousness. "It was given to you by another man, wasn't it? Excuse me, that's none of my business."

She answered his question with a little nod, thought of Jack, and settled the problem.

"I'd love to wear your ring," she said. "It is an honor that thrills me to the core."

ALL morning Ned had practiced furiously. The slight motion of the ship got on his nerves for a while, and he had begged Gail to hold the music on the rack for him and turn the sheets. Then he wanted to talk about music, and began a dissertation on Schubert.

For a time Gail fell in with his diabolic scheme to avoid practicing, but then she said quickly:

"I—I must go in and speak to your mother. Later—"

"Gee!" he protested boyishly. "Can't a fellow—"

"No," she said decisively, "he can't."

She hurried out of the small salon into the bedroom which she and Ned's mother occupied. Her roommate was lying on the couch, reading one of the new novels.

"Mrs. Willoughby," said Gail cheerily, "I thought perhaps you might like it if I trimmed your nails."

"You *are* sweet, my dear. They don't really need it, but I do so love to be fussed over on a boat!"

"Everybody does," smiled Gail, as she pulled a chair up beside the bed.

"Really, you know, you shouldn't feel that—"

"I don't," said Gail. "I enjoy doing it."

They spoke of inconsequential things, but inevitably the conversation came around to the matter that Mrs. Willoughby had uppermost in her mind.

"I can't understand such boldness," she said. "That Andrews girl actually booking passage on the same boat with us! She ought to understand that Ned has to work and work. So thoughtless! You know, I have a fetish about Ned. I really hate every woman who falls in love with him. It's quite terrible."

She sighed.

"No, it isn't," said Gail, her mind racing.

"But this Andrews girl deserves my hate. Ever since she met Ned at the Hamlins', she has pursued him relentlessly."

Gail concentrated on the regal hand before her and said nothing. There was a knock at the door.

As the blonde girl appeared in the doorway, Gail thought: "Speak of the devil—"

"Oh, Mrs. Willoughby," burbled Estelle Andrews, "I do hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Come in, Estelle," said Mrs. Willoughby quietly.

The young woman glided in and found a chair. She disregarded Gail entirely.

"This is Miss Andrews, Miss Sinclair," said the older woman with perfect composure.

"How do you do?" inquired Estelle, without looking at Gail. "Oh, Mrs. Willoughby," she went on, "I have a tremendous favor to ask you. Please be frank if it inconveniences you. I just stopped in at the beauty shop, and they're absolutely swamped with business—appointments all day to-day and most of to-morrow; and my nails are in such frightful shape! Could you *possibly* lend me your maid—after

she's finished with you, that is, of course."

A SILENCE descended upon the trio for a brief moment. Then Mrs. Willoughby was saying calmly:

"Miss Sinclair is Ned's *fiancée*, Estelle."

Estelle Andrews rose precipitately from her chair, her eyes dropping involuntarily to the solitaire on Gail's left hand. Her tone was throaty when she said finally:

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Sinclair. Ned hadn't told me."

"I don't believe," remarked Mrs. Willoughby, "that he has told any one yet."

"I must drop in and congratulate him," declared Estelle. "I'll just go in and wish him luck."

Gail stood up.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Andrews," she said with quiet dignity, "but Ned really can't see any one now. You know he must practice for his tour."

"Why, of course!" agreed Miss Andrews, her eyes darting flames of anger in Gail's direction. "Later, then. And—oh, yes—allow me to—er—to congratulate *you*, Miss Sinclair."

Gail's eyes were cold as she stood there, speechless, apparently sightless. Estelle Andrews made a mighty effort not to seem affected by her rival's unexpected dignity. Quietly and calmly, Gail opened the door to the salon and went in.

Her eyes were swimming in tears that she sought to hold back. Ned's playing was divine. He was completely absorbed in it till Gail's involuntary sob made him raise his head from the keys. He sat there a moment, then rose and came to where she sat.

"Don't stop," she told him.

"You're—crying!"

"You play so beautifully. Please go on."

"I've practiced long enough, honey."

*Honey!*

"Let's go up on deck," he went on, abashed by his own boldness.

Those glorious moments sitting in the deck chairs, watching the white-capped water rush past them, watching the great expanse of blue that seemed to have no limit, like their dreams! Ned spoke out of the mutually understood silence.

"Gail, Gail dear," he said, "it's only forty-eight hours—less—"

So impersonally he sat there, far from her; but it seemed to Gail that his arms had closed around her, that he was speaking to her softly from the vale of dreams.

"Gail," he went on, "something has happened to me."

Beware! For Jack's sake, beware! She must, must stop him. She must think of casual, insignificant things—things farthest from her mind.

NED was leaning forward in his chair, looking into her face questioningly, hopefully.

"Dear, I couldn't practice all morning. Your face was on the keys every moment. Music seemed so futile, as if it were no longer a part of me. There wasn't any room for anything else except—"

Gail had stood up. In her mind she saw Mrs. Willoughby, calm, trusting, hiring her for one purpose only, that the mother's vision of her son's greatness might come true—heard her saying:

"I really hate every woman who falls in love with him."

What would she think of a girl who

made him fall in love with her, who drew him from his career?

"Ned," she was saying, quietly, coldly, hating herself for being capable of such treachery to her own soul, "Ned, you simply *must* go back downstairs and practice."

"Oh, all right," he said dully.

Estelle Andrews was there, unexpectedly, in the deck chair beside him. Estelle's voice was saccharine.

"My dear, you mustn't nag the poor boy," she interposed gently. "Come on, Ned!"

"Later, Gail," said Ned, as he started off with the other girl.

They had gone ten paces when Gail caught up with them near the rail. Her grip on Ned's arm made him wince involuntarily.

"Ned," she said quietly, "I would like to go downstairs. Will you come with me, please?"

Her blue eyes were looking straight into his, which regarded her quizzically. Out of the corner of his eyes Ned saw a group of loungers on the deck watching them wonderingly.

"Very well," he replied, but there was a hint of resentment on his face. He turned toward Estelle Andrews. "I *am* sorry," he said earnestly. "I really—h-m—I really must practice now."

He took Estelle's hand in his and smiled disarmingly. Then he hurried away, with Gail after him; but Estelle caught Gail's arm and stopped her effectively.

"Miss Saint Clair," she said in an intense undertone.

"Sinclair," Gail corrected calmly.

"Oh, of course—Miss Sinclair. Step over to the rail with me, will you?" Her grip on Gail's arm was strong. After Gail had reluctantly carried out her request, she went on: "Sinclair, I want to warn you. When I want anything, I get it. I knew Ned Willoughby before you did. He's mine—and I'll get him!"

Gail's eyes were steady as she said laughingly:

"Let go my arm!"

The blond girl's hand dropped. Gail's mind raced. She must play her part.

"If you can get him, he's yours in the last reel."

"You make me sick!" exploded Estelle. Gail's tone completely baffled her. She had expected drama and had encountered burlesque.

"Are you quite through?"

"No. We've only just begun, Sinclair."

For a moment Gail was startled by the passionate intensity in the other's voice, the fervent hatred in her sullen eyes.

"What fun!" Gail said with forced levity, and hurried off.

When she passed through the salon again, Ned didn't so much as turn around, but continued to strike aimless, discordant notes.

She wanted to run to him, to ruffle his silky blond hair, to kiss him again and again, to tell him that she was sorry, that it was part of her job, that she hadn't meant to put him off when he'd started to say all those lovely, thrilling things, that she hadn't meant to nag him later.

Instead of telling him this, however, she hurried through the salon to engage Mrs. Willoughby in a perfunctory conversation about milk chocolates and sea sickness.

EIGHT days passed—eight days of coolness on Ned's part, eight centuries of torment for Gail. Moonlit nights, the orchestra playing

love songs. Glamorous nights made for love, with Ned irritated at her—resenting the fact that he had opened his heart to her for a brief moment, and had been forced to close it again, because she would not take what he had never before offered to any one so completely.

There came a bitter-sweet moment when they steamed through the Straits of Gibraltar, past the great Rock, and into that sapphire desert of water, the Mediterranean.

Gail knew that Ned was drumming monotonous Respighi *études* and Ravel encores only because she kept him at it as part of her job; Ned taking no more joy in it, only waiting for the evening, so that he could disappear for æons of minutes with Estelle Andrews, somewhere on a moonlit deck.

To-morrow—to-morrow they would be in Naples. Gail sat reading in the salon while Ned played the "Liebestraum." Then, suddenly, Ned broke off in the middle of a lovely bar and strode across the room to the porthole near which Gail was sitting.

"Gail!"

He was looking down at her eagerly, and his eyes were tender—so very tender.

"What is it, dear?" she asked quietly.

In a moment he was kneeling beside her, pouring out all that had been seething in his heart for days.

"My dear, my dear, I can't go on like this! I've never felt anything like this for any one before. I can't cheat myself by being mean and ugly. You see, I couldn't bear having you seem so cold about what meant so much to me. I love you!"

Her hand stroked his cheek.

"I know, Ned, dear."

Gently he kissed the wisp of hair that curled around her ear, and whispered, "I love you, I love you," till Gail thought she would faint with ecstasy.

THEY strolled up to the deck. The clean night wind buffeted their happy young faces as they stood by the rail watching the phosphorescent water swirl beneath them—Gail's dainty green *bouffant* skirt forming strange parabolas on the deck, Ned's hair dancing in the breeze as he looked deep into her eyes, reading their future there.

And in the shadow beyond the officers' cabins, unseen by the two at the rail, stood a tall, sinuous, blond girl, watching them jealously, listening anxiously for words that the wind might blow to her.

For a long while she watched them. She shuddered when Ned suddenly took Gail in his arms and kissed her. She waited—waited.

Gail was saying:

"It's wrong of me, Ned, it really is. Here I've been hired to keep your mind on your music, and now—"

"To the devil with music!" Ned interrupted impatiently. "Nothing matters to me, Gail dearest, nothing but you."

"It shouldn't be that way, Ned. Neither you nor your mother wanted it that way. You know you planned the *fiancée* idea yourself."

"It was mother's idea."

"Well, but you wouldn't have let her pay me so much to keep other people out of your way if this tour weren't of paramount importance."

"Oh, Gail, darling, why talk about that now? Everything is different now—can't you see that?"

She laughed a little.

"Oh, you're so sweet, but how can

I take money as Miss Bumper, as your protecting *fiancée*, if—"

"Money! Why worry about that? Darling, you're my *real* fiancée now. I love you. I want you for my wife."

"Oh, Ned, Ned!"

The woman in the shadows could not bear the torment of witnessing their ecstasy. She had heard enough, and a scheme had shaped itself in her mind.

She slipped away from the cabin and hurried down to the lower deck. There she ran into a pink-faced lad who headed a laughing, joking group.

"Well, well, Pinkie, fahncy meeting you heah!" said Estelle. "Listen, gang, if you want to hear a funny one. That girl who's supposed to be Ned Willoughby's *fiancée* isn't his *fiancée* at all. She was hired to play the part—imagine!—so that his lordship could work undisturbed. She admitted it herself to one of the officers aboard this ship. Can you tie that?"

Gasps—laughter—incredulity; but soon they were talking over this new bit of gossip.

Estelle Andrews had started the ball rolling to her own satisfaction before she hurried down to Mrs. Willoughby's suite. She found the older woman busy at her dressing table in the bedroom.

"So sorry to bother you—"

"Not at all," was the casual answer. "Sit down." Mrs. Willoughby turned about in her chair. "What is it?" she inquired coldly.

"Mrs. Willoughby, I'm in a bad spot, as they say. It's to be expected that I'd be jealous of Ned, for you know how fond I am of him; and anything I say about his *fiancée* would be—er—"

"Let us say a waste of time," interposed Ned's mother.

Estelle Andrews rose and shrugged her shoulders.

"I guess you're right. It's none of my business," She gauged her pause perfectly, like the excellent actress she was. She was facing Mrs. Willoughby now. "It's just that it angers me to see Ned and you cheated."

"Cheated?"

"Mrs. Willoughby, when a person is hired to do a confidential bit of work, has he—has *she* any right to betray that confidence?"

Mrs. Willoughby rose; her face flushed crimson.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this—it's all over this boat right now that Sinclair—that Gail Sinclair was hired to act as a bumper *fiancée*. Several young men have paid her attention, and I dare say she had to tell them she wasn't really your son's *fiancée* to soothe their consciences."

Mrs. Willoughby was keenly disturbed. She walked silently across the small stateroom. Estelle would have given much to be sure that the woman was convinced.

"Will you go now, my dear?"

Estelle Andrews left hurriedly.

WHEN Ned and Gail came down to the suite, less than a half hour later, engrossed in their new-found happiness, Mrs. Willoughby was sitting in a chair, staring straight ahead of her.

She had been upstairs for as long as she could bear it. She had seen it in people's eyes, from the way they had stopped their conversations at her approach, from their forced tones when they spoke to her. It had been all too clear.

Gail, seeing that hard, cold look on the face of Ned's mother, the look she

had seen only once before—when Mrs. Willoughby had expressed her frank hatred of Estelle Andrews, of any woman who endangered her son's career—Gail had a ghastly premonition that she could not fight off.

"Oh, mother dear," Ned was saying, "Gail and I—"

"Sit down," Mrs. Willoughby told them. "Sit down, both of you."

They obeyed, perplexed, forming a businesslike triangle, as on the day when Gail had been hired.

"Gail—er—Miss Sinclair, I have never discharged an employee before, but—"

"Mother!"

"Edward, please be kind enough to wait till I have finished speaking. I was saying, it's a new sensation for me to let an employee go. You were engaged to act as Edward's *fiancée* and thus save him from the annoying attentions of others. When you revealed the plan to others, you must admit that it loses its force, and that you outlive your usefulness."

Gail's hands seemed icy cold. She breathed quickly, and tears could not be forced down from her eyes.

"Mrs. Willoughby, what do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean. If you listen to the conversations on this boat, you will realize how foolish it was to share your secret with other men."

"Mrs. Willoughby, that isn't true," declared Gail. "Really, believe me, it isn't."

"Please do not make it worse. You have nothing to worry about. Your fare home will be paid."

"Listen here, mother—I've had about enough of this. It's a damnable lie, whoever told it to you. I *know* Gail wouldn't do such a thing. Say, listen here, was it Estelle Andrews, mother?"

"Miss Sinclair, we shall make all arrangements as soon as we arrive tomorrow."

Ned had risen.

"Was it Estelle Andrews, mother?"

"What difference does it make, Edward?" said Mrs. Willoughby coldly.

"No, you're right—it doesn't make any difference, now that *Gail and I are going to be married!*"

MRS. WILLOUGHBY was staring at her son. The color rose in her face and then died away, leaving her skin a ghastly white. She looked to Gail older than the girl had ever seen her.

"Ned," she said in almost a whisper. "Ned—your tour, your career, your music, Ned!"

Ned could not assume the apparent calm of his mother.

"I don't care a hoot for music right now, do you hear?" he almost shouted. "I love Gail more than anything else in the world. Nothing else matters."

Never before had Gail felt so warm a thrill in her heart; but that awful premonition — couldn't Ned see what he was doing?

"Ned dear," she said, "you mustn't speak that way about your music. Why should love exclude it?"

"But, Gail," he replied intensely, coming close to her and taking her hands into his, "it shrinks into insignificance in comparison."

Mrs. Willoughby saw things more clearly now. She was a clever woman, and she had a gift for doing the right thing at the right time.

"How silly," she was saying, "for us to be so dramatic about it! We can settle this so easily. The music has been playing on deck for some min-

utes; we must all go upstairs and enjoy ourselves. Let us forget everything that has been said—until to-morrow."

Despite her soothing tone, Gail knew that Ned's mother was as disturbed within as she could possibly be. She sensed that Ned's announcement of their love for each other made Mrs. Willoughby's suspicions of her loyalty comparatively unimportant. His mother's mind was working along a different path now.

"But, mother, I want this thing clear about Gail. We were talking on deck about it, and some one must have overheard—perhaps Estelle herself."

"Why, of course," she said casually. "Still, it was rather indiscreet of you both, wasn't it?" She laughed gayly, as if it were a huge joke. "And now, my dear, your hair seems a little mussed from the wind. Don't you think you'd better run in and fix it?"

*Overcome by emotion, he played as never before*

AS soon as Gail had slipped into the bedroom, with a sweet understanding smile in Ned's direction, Mrs. Willoughby called her son to the lounge, where a conversation could not possibly be heard in an adjoining room.

"Aren't you going to congratulate me, mother?"

The woman smiled mirthlessly.

"You must consider this carefully, Ned. No Willoughby has ever married a manicurist."

"Mother, I forbid you—"

"No dramatics, Edward! Face the facts. She is that. I'll admit she's very charming, refined, poised. She's fine as Miss Bumper; but as the wife of Ned Willoughby?"

"Perfect."

"Be sure, Ned!"

"I am."

"What are you going to tell the Maestro when we arrive? Think of the years he's worked with you—his plans and hopes for you."

"The Maestro" they called him, the intense Hungarian master who had made a great musician out of the young Edward Willoughby. His mother knew that would be a soft spot.

"Why worry about that? I'll go on with the career, I suppose. It's just that Gail is paramount now. Don't speak to me about it, mother, please!"

She laughed.

"What is—er—Gail going to tell her *fiancé?*"

"Her what?"

Mrs. Willoughby produced a little sapphire ring from her bag and held it out toward him. He read the inscription:

TO G. FROM J.

"She asks me to keep it for her," his mother said.

"What about it?" Ned responded uneasily. "I see no reason for mistrusting Gail. When she has time for it, she'll undoubtedly tell me."

"Very well," said Mrs. Willoughby, with the tone of a district attorney who has cast suspicion into a jury's mind. She turned to her son, then, and went on: "Ned dear, I hope, I do hope, you will be very happy.

"Oh, Gail, my dear," she added, in a louder voice, "what's keeping you? Shan't we go up and dance?"

DANCING amid the merry throng on the deck strung with Japanese lanterns, in Ned's strong, eager arms, Gail tried to tell herself that everything would be all right; but she knew that it was useless to fool herself. Mrs. Willoughby had found the moment to pull her aside, unobserved, and say:

"Be a sweet girl and run down to the cabin in half an hour, say, alone. I would so love to talk with you, my dear."

And now she was trying to hide her doubts from Ned, who danced so divinely that one felt troubles didn't exist in such a universe of perfect rhythm.

"Happy?" he asked, while the orchestra played a soft, lilting fox trot.

"Yes, darling."

They were giving people much to talk about. A hired *fiancée*, perhaps; but they must be wonderful actors!

"We're going to be so happy! We'll go to Florence, Venice, Vienna—after Naples, of course."

"Oh, let's wait till it happens. I couldn't stand the disappointment if—"

"No ifs, honey!"

The music had stopped.

Gail raised her hands to her head.

"This breeze does do terrible things to my hair. I'll be right back, darling."

"I'll go down with you."

"Oh, never mind," she insisted.

"Love to."

Hand in hand they hurried across the deck.

Ned sat down at the piano as they came into the suite.

"Oh, hello, mother! Didn't know you were down here."

"Play something, dear. Play something sweet."

Dreamily Ned began to play the melody that he was beginning to associate more and more with Gail and his love for her and hers for him—the lovely "Liebestraum," or "Dream of Love."

Gail went into the bedroom and closed the door behind her.

"You do love my son, don't you?" Mrs. Willoughby began.

"More than anything else in the world," Gail said earnestly.

"And Ned's music is terrifically important to him, despite his present intensity about his love."

"Oh, I know, I know!"

Gail felt as if her heart were being wrung from her at the sound of the melody that was wafted in from the next room.

"My dear," continued Mrs. Willoughby, "let us make it brief. You love Ned, and you want him to be happy, don't you?"

Gail knew so well what was coming.

She felt that she wanted to recite in chorus with Ned's mother:

"If you *really* love him, my dear, you will give him up."

Well, thought Gail, there it was. It was out, said, over; and how true, how terribly true, she told herself! Ned must lose himself in his work for a few more years—no diversions, least of all love and marriage. Love—this thing that surged within her at the sound of his magic touch on the piano—a diversion!

She listened patiently, however, and in the end, though it wrung her heart, she weakened.

"Perhaps, till the big concert at the Maestro's, I'd better—"

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Willoughby. "That's just the point. You must vanish soon after we arrive. I shall take care of all expenses. I shall find a place for you to stay in Naples till the boat sails back or we can get a booking. Then you must go out of his life, my dear, for his sake—for a few years, at least," she added.

"But if he suffers—"

"A few days, Gail, and then he'll be engrossed in his music once more. He'll be all the better for a—shall we say a fine experience?"

She spoke as if it was just a little infatuation, something to be forgotten in a few days; and all the while Ned was rhapsodizing to Gail of their newfound paradise.

Little did he know that it was already lost!

"Then I can trust you, dear, to say nothing to Ned?"

"Yes, you can."

"Spend to-morrow together, after we land. Then, the following day—"

But Mrs. Willoughby saw suddenly that she had said enough, for Gail Sinclair's little body was racked with sobs, while Ned continued to play the "Liebestraum" with a happy spirit.

RIDING along a water front street bordering the harbor, Gail tried pitifully to key herself up to Ned's exuberance.

Mrs. Willoughby had tactfully stayed behind at the hotel. She knew that this visit to Harry Landis, Ned's best friend, meant much to her son. Then, too, she was not without some sympathy for Gail, who had, after all, cleared her sky of threatening clouds by her willingness to comply with the older woman's plans.

The hot morning sun was high in the heavens, glaring down upon the ships and small boats in the harbor at their right, flashing on windows and roofs on the high hill behind them. Here, thought Gail, she could really be happy, if only—

She mustn't, mustn't think of it, or she would burst into tears. Away out on the seaward horizon she could see the gray bulk that was Capri, and before them, in the distance, glowered Vesuvius, sending skyward a sullen curl of smoke as a sinister reminder of its dormant powers of destruction.

"Ned, Ned!" she breathed. "It's beautiful!"

"I can't see beyond your eyes this morning, dearest," he answered.

His arm went around her, and in a moment he had kissed her. After a pause she asked:

"Is it far to Harry's?"

"Not very," he answered.

"You'll be crazy about Harry when you meet him," Ned went on. "He's the best friend any fellow could have. He's arranged everything with the Maestro for the concert next week."

"Where is it to be, dear?"

"Oh," answered Ned, suppressing a

yawn, "at the Maestro's own villa. All the concert managers and bookers of Europe are to be there."

"Ned! How marvelous!"

"Thought so when we left the States; but now—oh, well!"

He crushed her hand in his. There was no doubt about it, Gail decided, her heart like lead in her breast—she was going to do the only possible thing, for Ned's sake.

Harry's little villa had a perfect view of the Bay of Naples, being situated on one of the hills above the city. They sat on the terrace of his house in wicker chairs, while long, cool orangeades were brought to them by Harry's man.

FOR more than an hour the three of them sat there, finding many things in common, talking, talking. Harry brought up incidents of his and Ned's long friendship; Ned told Gail the details enthusiastically; and both young men were happy to have made so perfect a threesome out of their old-established twosome.

Then Harry said suddenly:

"Why not marry over here, *à la* Tunney?"

Ned's face broke into happy smiles.

"Say, that's an idea! What do you say, honey?"

Gail's face struggled into a wan smile.

"I'd—I'd adore it," she managed; "but, Ned, first the concert and the tour—"

Ned rose from his chair.

"Once and for all, Gail, get this straight—you come first. As for the concert and the tour—"

They just had time to catch the boat that went to Capri. On the trip Harry tactfully withdrew for many minutes at a time, leaving the lovers together on deck, lost in the joy of each other's company and the loveliness of the deep blue water and the long stretch of shore line and mountains beyond it.

"Over there is Pompeii," cried Ned. "We'll see it together—to-morrow."

Of all the words in the English language "to-morrow" was the one Gail could bear least to hear. To Ned, they were alone on the deck; he drew her close to him and looked down into her eyes.

"Happy?"

"Just to be with you," she answered with a sob in her voice.

His eager lips were pressed against hers.

"I do love you so, Gail!" he said passionately.

"And I love you, Ned, more than anything else in the world. Never forget that, dear—promise?"

"Cross my heart." His hot breath was on her cheek.

"My love, why don't we get married right away?"

CERTAINLY, Gail thought, the furies were conspiring against her to tear her heart into bits. To be married right away—to call Ned hers and hear him call her his—perfection! Instead, she would soon be the loneliest passenger on the very ship that had given her her first real happiness.

"Answer me, Gail," he said, perplexed by her long silence. "Why don't we?"

"You're sweet," she murmured evasively. "Look at the funny little boats with the men holding up signs! They're taxis—from all the hotels."

"Sure enough," Ned said. "What a strange-looking place it is!"

"Capri!" She caressed the name as if it were an answer to a dream.

Ned would not let the subject drop. Half an hour later they were ducking their heads in the little rowboats as they shot through the rocky entrance of the famous Blue Grotto. The weird, iridescent blue light that seemed to come from the sapphire water of the great cavern filled them both with a new ecstasy.

Ned had Gail in his arms. This beauty that dazzled her eyes and filled her heart shut out her torture for a moment. Ned's nearness was exquisite joy, now suddenly to be turned again to pain.

"Gail, now you must answer me. As soon as I fix things up to-night, will you marry me?"

She sat upright in the seat.

"Don't!" she said, her voice low and intense. "Don't ask me that again, Ned!"

He looked at her in surprise.

"Why, darling, I—"

Suddenly she was crying, her shoulders shaken by irrepressible sobs, her hands clutching his frantically.

"Gail!"

"Don't talk to me, please, please!"

NED'S mind, perplexed by her unexpected moods, cast about for explanations. He thought suddenly of a little sapphire ring with the inscription:

To G. FROM J.

He couldn't resist the temptation. He didn't want to press her for information that she would not give unasked; but a demon within him goaded him on, assured him that he had a right to know.

"Gail," he said, "do you—er—still wear the sapphire ring?"

"Sometimes." She thought with panic of the plan she had arranged with Mrs. Willoughby. The ring was to play its part. She must be careful what she said.

"Can't you give it up for me?"

"No, Ned, I can't."

"Why?" he asked a little petulantly.

"Jack give it to me, Ned; and I love Jack."

Ned started.

"I see," he said coolly. "You love him." Then, looking out over the harbor, speckled with lights, he said emphatically: "Some day you'll have to decide between us, Gail."

Her long silence frightened him. And when she said deliberately: "I shall," it frightened him even more.

"I do love you so, Gail," he said impetuously.

Gail, unable to speak, gave herself up to his kisses; but her lips were sealed.

AFTER hours of searching for Gail the next day, Ned finally found her note. It read:

NED:

I've made a frightful mistake. I think the proper phrase is—forgive and forget. I must go back to Jack.

MISS BUMPER.

Ned was frantic.

"It's just as well, my dear," said his mother philosophically. "You see, mother is *sometimes* right."

Tears in Ned's eyes were unusual, but now there were tears.

"For Heaven's sake, mother!" he raged. "This is horrible, horrible! I must find her—I *must* find her!"

"She is probably a hundred miles out of Naples right now," Mrs. Willoughby calmly replied. Now be a man. Go and practice for your concert."

"I'll never touch the piano again till I find her!"

Mrs. Willoughby yawned. Ned stuffed the note into his pocket and hurried out.

"Give him a day," his mother thought. "The Willoughbys have always been self-sufficient." Then her mind turned to Gail. "I do hope she'll be all right, sweet child," she mused. "It's too bad—it really is too bad!"

FIVE days later Mrs. Willoughby had vague doubts. Ned hadn't got over it by any means. Long hours he would walk the streets with Harry, inquire at travel bureaus, hotels, and restaurants. When he did get down to the piano, he would strike discordant disconnected notes.

There was a wild look in his eyes; and the big concert was only two days off, with the Maestro tearing his hair and muttering heated Italian curses. It had taken longer than Mrs. Willoughby had expected for the youngest of the Willoughbys to become self-sufficient.

Harry Landis wore a worried expression.

"For Heaven's sake, old man," he would say over and over again, "go back to the hotel and practice—for her sake. We'll find her before long."

GAIL sat in her room at an obscure little hotel. The room was hung with ugly pink chintz curtains. Her eyes were red about the rims. She was trying to read. Her supper, practically untouched, was on the desk, cold. She could not sleep, she could not eat.

At first, during those five horrible days, she had gone out occasionally in the little black dress and the hat with the veil which Mrs. Willoughby had provided for her.

She must sit here in this dingy little room till it was time to hurry to the boat to-morrow—must sit here, dreaming of Ned's strong arms, of his sweet, tender kisses. It was ghastly, when she knew that she would never have those arms around her again, nor feel the ecstasy of his embraces.

And all the while Ned was at the piano at last, forcing down the flame of love and sorrow that seemed to be consuming him.

THE great concert in the Maestro's spacious villa was a picture of dignity and formality. Exquisitely gowned ladies and perfectly groomed gentlemen filled the large hall, at one end of which stood the concert grand piano. Polite conversation, expectancy, here and there an interested group listening to the history of the young Edward Willoughby.

The young Edward Willoughby was in torment.

"I can't play to-night. It's impossible!"

"You must, my dear," said his mother. "I never heard you play better than you did last night. You'll do it again to-night."

"Oh, but last night was different. I still had hope then. Have you heard from Harry?"

"You mustn't think of Harry now, Ned. No—no word from him yet."

"Oh, good Lord! And I'm expected to play!"

"Yes. It's your whole future, Ned."

Ned looked at his mother, his eyes blazing.

"I'm beginning to suspect you. Please go away."

"Ned!"

"If you don't want me to rush out of this room and back to the hotel," he quietly insisted, "go away."

Mrs. Willoughby went away.

She sat amid the polite audience, listening to her son's rendition of a Chopin concerto. If his playing was no better when he interpreted Beethoven in the second number on the program, she knew his career was over.

IT was nearly time for Gail to leave for the boat, but she was weeping piteously, unable to force herself to take the irrevocable step that would separate her forever from Ned.

"If I could get one more glimpse of him before I go!" she sobbed.

Finally her mind was made up. For the sake of Ned Willoughby she would renounce the love that had come between him and the music that meant so much to him. Maybe some day he would forget her...and be happy... and become a great musician. The sacrifice would not be in vain.

But she must first slip over to the Maestro's villa, feast her hungering eyes on him for the last time on the night of his triumph.

Then she would have courage to go away, and worship forever at the empty shrine that she had erected to him in her own heart.

So she went to the Maestro's villa, and was peering wistfully through one of its great windows into the brilliantly lighted scene of young Willoughby's concert, when she felt a gentle touch on the shoulder. It was Harry Landis.

"Come inside. He needs you so much!"

Without a word she turned and entered.

THUS it was that as Ned Willoughby sat down to play Beethoven, his heart pounding wildly within him, his fingers cold and clammy, wishing that he were dead, he unexpectedly caught sight of a little figure dressed in a simple black frock in the very back of the hall.

Then, overcome by emotions that he had never before experienced, Ned broke into his most perfect rendition of the "Liebestraum."

The audience was amazed. Caught by the fine sincerity and rapture of the young pianist's playing, it listened eagerly, charmed and hypnotized.

Mrs. Willoughby, keen to notice the changed spirit of her son's artistry, instinctively sensed a new presence. She swung around in her chair and saw Gail Sinclair, her eyes wide with love and pride in the man of her heart.

Ned's mother had a new vision then, and she took into her heart the girl who had turned Willoughby's second-rate concert into a genuine and spectacular triumph.

After it was all over, and they were alone together at last, Ned remarked to Gale:

"By the way, a cablegram came for you while you were away."

The pianist fished into his pocket and produced a message. Gail tore it open hastily and read:

> Fully recovered. Got big engineering job. Letter follows. Love.
>
> JACK.

"My darling brother!" Gail exclaimed. "I'm *so* glad!"

"Your brother?"

The girl nodded, too happy to speak.

"Why, you silly little goose! I thought—"

He rained kisses upon her eyes and cheeks and lips. Then he repeated, in a tone of mingled amazement, reproach and infinite tenderness:

"You silly little goose!"

THE END

# Jockeying for Love

*With King Love up, Mary-Lee's thoroughbred Prince Karl won the greatest race of all*

## By W. Carey Wonderly

OF course, J. J. Horton wasn't the only one who had noticed Mary-Lee's eager young face as she sat there at the switchboard in the Tudor Arms Hotel. Hers was the wholesome type which attracted men who were weary of the slang and sophistication of the rough-and-ready flappers of to-day. Mary-Lee had charm and a crystal clear voice, and she was willing and gentle and efficient.

Because she was all these things, and had invariably greeted him with a welcoming smile, "Uncle Joe" remembered her in his will. He left her his race horse, Prince Karl.

Coming into the lobby of the Tudor Arms that bright spring morning, Larry Chester glanced a second time at Mary-Lee and thought he understood why his late employer had bequeathed his favorite thoroughbred to this girl, who was neither kith nor kin of his.

Mary-Lee was no flapper and yet she was as up-to-date as the headlines in the morning newspaper. Her rich brown hair was cut short and curled all over her beautifully shaped head. Her eyes were a deep, dark blue, with a long fringe of darker brown lashes. And she used practically no rouge or lip stick, for the excellent reason that she didn't require them.

Larry, suddenly remembering his business, approached the switchboard. He was tall and lean and tanned by the sun, not as fashionably groomed as Julian Wentworth, for instance, but decidedly nice looking in an outdoor, athletic way.

"You are Miss Mary Taylor?" he ventured, removing his hat.

His hair was fair, almost red, and Mary-Lee loved the wave which neither brushing nor water would ever eradicate.

"I am Mary-Lee Taylor," she corrected, gently emphasizing the Lee. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"My name is Chester," explained Larry, "and I used to work for J. J. Horton. He left you his horse, Prince Karl, in his will. I'm going to Canada and I want to turn the animal over to you. I've been taking care of Karl since J. J.'s death, but now—of course—haven't you made any arrangements?" he added as he read the dismay on her countenance. "You know, you will either have to get a trainer or—perhaps you intend to sell the horse?"

Mary-Lee met his eyes most confidingly. "I didn't want to sell Prince Karl," she said.

LARRY rather liked her for that sentiment, though common sense told him that that would be the wisest thing to do.

"Were your plans to race him?" he asked then.

Mary-Lee smiled—and Mary-Lee's smiles were devastating.

"I guess I didn't have any plans," she told him. "I know little about horses, and less about racing, but I'm sort of thrilled over Prince Karl. It was wonderful of Mr. Horton to give him to me. I know from hearing him talk how fond he was of the horse. Somehow, because of this, I don't want to sell—if I can help it. But—what can I do?"

"You'll have to engage a trainer," Larry answered promptly.

She hesitated. "You trained for Mr. Horton, I believe?"

"Yes, I was with J. J. for three years. My health wasn't good; the doctors told me to get work in the open. I was born in Kentucky, knew something about horses, and I reckon I was really glad to have an excuse to give up my office job and return to the life I loved. Of course I'm all right now—as hard as nails—and—"

"You're returning to your office job?"

"No. None of that for me again. I'm going to Chicago, to look into an offer made me by a turfman out there."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" cried Mary-Lee with a deep sigh.

Larry Chester found himself asking "Why?" The watch on his wrist warned him that he had little time to waste, and goodness knows he had had no intention of helping to solve a girl's problems when he ran into the hotel. All he had planned to do was to turn over the horse to Mary Taylor—no, Mary-Lee Taylor, and then taxi to Grand Central in time to catch his train.

But he liked Mary-Lee's voice and manner every bit as much as he liked her dark curls and her long-lashed blue eyes. In spite of himself, he lingered. There were other trains to Chicago.

"I was thinking," she answered him at that moment, "that if you were going to remain in the East—and perhaps train for a turfman here—you could sort of keep an eye on Prince Karl, too. Of course, it wouldn't pay you—just one horse. But if you wanted to stay—and could get others—

Chicago is pretty far, isn't it? No, I wouldn't want you to take Prince Karl there, where I'd never see him. I'm sorry. And I am grateful to you—for everything." She offered him her hand. "Thank you, Mr. Chester, and—good luck."

She was such a thoroughbred herself! Larry held his ground, especially when an immaculately groomed man of indeterminable age stepped from the elevator and moved with catlike agility across the lobby to the switchboard. He was dark and handsome. After a glance at Larry he ignored him as completely as if he wasn't around. But Larry was observing, listening, missing nothing.

"I'm late this morning," said Julian Wentworth to Mary-Lee, "but I wanted to remind you that everything is fixed for to-night. The agency has got hold of some front row seats and the flowers will be delivered to you not later than five o'clock. Orchids, brown and yellow, Mary-Lee, to set off your hair. In the meantime you must decide on the place where you prefer to dine. My chauffeur will call for you at six thirty, remember."

"But I'll have to work until six." Mary-Lee spoke slowly, with her deep, lovely eyes on Wentworth's face. "Please don't send orchids, and let's go for dinner to a tea room. You—you're spoiling me."

"Nonsense!" he scoffed lightly. "The best is none too good for you. I want you to see all the beautiful things in New York—the big hotels, the best shows, everything. That's the kind of friend I am—all that is biggest and finest for little Mary-Lee! I'm on my way. Remember—six thirty. And orchids."

Again Julian Wentworth's glance traveled over and past Larry as he sauntered out of the Tudor Arms lobby.

LARRY wanted to laugh, but out of deference to Mary-Lee he held himself in check. Yet he couldn't quite smother the grin which played around the corners of his shapely mouth.

"Well, that's that," he remarked to Mary-Lee.

She was looking very serious. "I suppose so."

"I'm referring to—the orchids."

"Oh! He's very kind and generous. His name is Julian Wentworth and he's comfortably rich and lives in this hotel. He's always wanting me to go out with him. I adore the theater, but flowers—dinner at the Plaza—uniformed chauffeur—I wish he wouldn't. Of course any normal girl likes attention, but just the same—"

"I see." He thought he was beginning to. "Well, suppose you don't do anything about Prince Karl then, Miss Taylor."

He saw the blood rush to her cheeks, a most alluring picture. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that I may not get the job in Chicago," answered Larry Chester. "In that case, I'll stay around New York and open a public stable. That means I'll accept horses to train from several different owners, and of course I'll be glad to keep the Prince."

"Oh, I hope—" She broke off, her hands clasped upon her breast, and looked a little shamefacedly at Larry. "I shouldn't say that," she added hastily. "I hope you'll do the thing which is best for your future, Mr. Chester, but if you do remain in New York—well, that would be wonderful for Prince Karl and me."

Larry nodded and tried to look un-

decided. What a darling she was, and what a cad Julian Wentworth seemed to be!

"You'll hear from me to-morrow."

"I'll be waiting eagerly for your decision."

Mentally he took stock of his resources. Since Horton's sudden death Larry had drawn no salary, and his balance at the bank was so small it could scarcely be seen by the naked eye. He couldn't afford orchids, the Plaza, front row seats.

"You ought to come down to the track and have a look at the Prince," was all he could think of to say.

"I'm off this Sunday," Mary-Lee ventured.

"Then I'll take you down Sunday," said Larry, unconsciously throwing out his chest.

"You mean if you're not in Chicago, don't you?" hazarded Mary-Lee.

"Oh, I'll fix that," Larry declared. "This Sunday—Long Island—to have a look at Prince Karl. That's a date."

"Yes, it's a date," returned Mary-Lee with a happy smile. "Because Mr. Wentworth will come along with all sorts of bait unless I'm positive. Well, I am. Firm. As Gibraltar," she added to herself.

IT was going to be hard to live up to brown and yellow orchids, and front row seats at a revue, and dinner at a world-famous hotel, but somehow Mary-Lee managed it all. She went without a spring suit to buy an evening frock—a lovely, ethereal thing with golden tones which brought out the rich brown of her hair and looked adorable with Julian's flowers. She wore them high on one shoulder—rare, expensive blooms which had cost more than her dress. Mary-Lee hated to cover them with her coat, and so she left it a trifle open. Thus it happened that while the weather was mild and springlike, she contracted a cold.

"You work too hard," cried Julian Wentworth. "It breaks my heart to see you there at the switchboard, day after day, early and late. You are too beautiful, too exquisite for such drudgery, Mary-Lee. Marry me and come away to Europe—California—rest and plenty of happiness. You know how I love you, don't you?"

"I know you're very kind," answered Mary-Lee; "but, Julian, I'm not sure I love you. You never ask me that."

"Love will come after marriage," he announced in a satisfied voice.

"You'd be willing to chance it?" Mary-Lee closed her eyes and thought hard. "I don't know," she said, half to herself. "Love is too fragile, too precious. I must be sure of my heart, Julian."

Wentworth tried to seize her hand. "Come with me Sunday up to Connecticut—"

"I've an engagement for Sunday," Mary-Lee interrupted, coloring deliciously at the memory.

His black brows met in a jealous frown. "You said nothing about it to me. With whom have you an engagement, Mary-Lee?"

She saw no reason for not telling him. "With Mr. Chester—"

"Never heard of him!"

"He was Mr. Horton's trainer," explained Mary-Lee, "and he is going to take me down to the Long Island track to see Prince Karl."

"Prince—who?"

"My race horse, Prince Karl."

"Good heavens!" Julian Wentworth burst out laughing. "Have done with such nonsense, sweetheart. What do

you want with a race horse? Or if you want one, I'll buy you a whole racing stable after we're married. Old Horton has merely saddled you with a white elephant, dearest. I know something about the sport, and this Prince Karl is old and sour—he hasn't won a race since the Civil War—almost. Of course you'll come with me to Connecticut—"

"No," Mary-Lee said gently, but firmly. "I'm going down to Long Island with Mr. Chester."

"Nonsense! A common horse trainer?"

"How do you know he is common?" demanded Mary-Lee. "At least his services seem to be very much in demand, and he worked with Mr. Horton for three years. He had an offer to train for a Chicago sportsman, but decided he'd rather remain here in the East. He's consented to train Prince Karl for me, and—"

Wentworth was laughing again, albeit there was little mirth in his voice.

"You precious innocent!" he said. "We'll give Chester the nag for his trouble and then you're coming with me—"

Mary-Lee was white, fighting mad, but all she said was, "Am I?" in grim, level tones.

"If sometimes I think our friendship is all a mistake, Julian," she added a little later, "you have only yourself to blame. You have no right to speak to me like that. Must I remind you that you are neither my father, my guardian, nor my husband? Any girl with self-respect just wouldn't tolerate it, Julian. You have been very lovely to me—"

"What I've been isn't a marker to what I'd like to be, dear," interposed Wentworth. "It's because I love you so that I forget myself and say such things. I was sincere when I told you Prince Karl is a pretty cheap sort of horse, unable to pay his way. You'd far better sell him for whatever you can get."

He seemed sincere, but Mary-Lee found herself stubbornly holding her ground.

"I think Uncle Joe Horton wouldn't want that," she murmured. "He was awfully fond of Karl. I'm sure he left him to me because he was fond of me, Julian."

"We'll let it go at that. But the horse is an expense, not an asset, dearest. It costs money to keep a race horse, even a poor one, and if he doesn't win races—"

"Larry thinks he will."

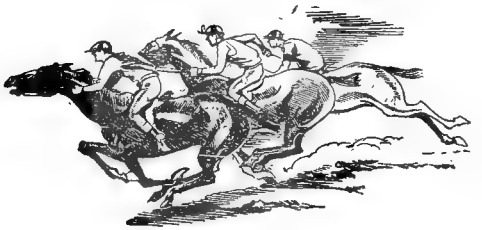
"'Larry'?" Wentworth's brows went up and met the widow's peak which came down on his forehead.

"Larry Chester," Mary-Lee said coolly. "At least he's going to try to win with Prince Karl for me. Be a sport and give us a chance."

LARRY watched Mary-Lee very closely when he called for her in his rather ancient flivver to drive her down to Aqueduct, where the late Joe Horton's stable was still quartered. The old car which he used to get around in was a far cry from Julian Wentworth's Rolls-Royce, but Larry liked the friendly manner in which she greeted him and her real delight as she made herself comfortable beside him. There was no vain regret for past glories here. Mary-Lee was aglow with the adventure before her.

Now Larry was glad he had refused the offer to go to Chicago, even though it meant loss of money and prestige. The task he had set himself wasn't going to be so easy, yet he felt it was worth the sacrifice just to serve Mary-

Lee and see her sometimes. So far, love had never entered into his scheme of things, for he stoutly maintained that a young man should achieve a certain financial importance before asking a girl to share his lot in life. But



when he looked at the utterly charming Mary-Lee, so sweet, so vitally interested and friendly, he felt a weakening of purpose.

The day was ideal, with fleecy white clouds chasing across the blue sky, and numerous living green things pushing their way up out of old Mother Earth. It was indeed spring once more, and romance was in the air.

The old Aqueduct track, scarcely prepossessing, filled Mary-Lee with wonder and delight. Sturdy little lads were out on the track, exercising horses, and weather-lazy grooms lounged in the sunshine. Larry took her to the barn and introduced her to Prince Karl.

The horse, a flashy chestnut which immediately caught the eye, was as docile and as playful as a St. Bernard puppy. After blinking solemnly at his new mistress for a moment, he gave his head a little nod of approval and set to work looking for favorite titbits in her pockets and purse.

"He's after sugar or carrots," explained Larry, pleased with the scene.

Mary-Lee looked heartbroken. "And I haven't a thing!"

"But I have," smiled Larry, and he slipped her several lumps of sugar which she fed to the old thoroughbred. "You've won him for keeps; I've never seen such a complete surrender."

"He's a darling," cried Mary-Lee. "I never dreamed—"

Larry nodded. "Yes, you do get that way about 'em. Karl's an affectionate old boy, and he'll win races for you if such a thing is possible. Wait and see."

"Suppose I had consented to sell him!" she cried, aghast at the idea. "Julian wanted me to. Oh, I could never part with him now. He's mine—my very own! It's so good to feel that something belongs to you, Mr. Chester. I've nobody in the world, and I live in boarding houses, so I've never even had a kitten before. I believe in you, Karl," Mary-Lee told the horse, her hand on his short rein, "and I'll be very patient and loyal until you win for me."

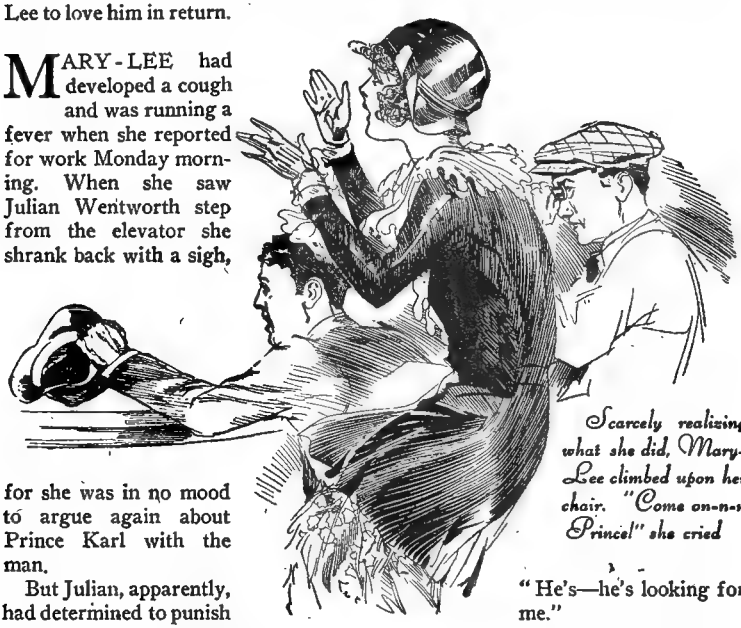
Larry took her to dinner at a quaint old roadside inn where they had plenty of time to become even better acquainted. He was in high spirits, and a sort of hang-the-expense mood, for she and the Prince had taken immediately to each other, and he wasn't disappointed. Larry felt that if Mary-Lee hadn't loved old Karl the minute they met he would have missed something fine in her. Perhaps he'd have loved her as much as ever, but there would have been something lacking.

For, going home to New York that Sunday evening, he knew he loved her.

He thrilled to the sweetness of it. It was more exciting, more satisfying than winning races. Here he was with

less than five hundred dollars to his name, minus a job and with plenty of hard work ahead of him, and yet... happy as he'd never been before. He loved her, and he made up his mind, then and there, that he'd teach Mary-Lee to love him in return.

MARY-LEE had developed a cough and was running a fever when she reported for work Monday morning. When she saw Julian Wentworth step from the elevator she shrank back with a sigh, for she was in no mood to argue again about Prince Karl with the man.



*Scarcely realizing what she did, Mary-Lee climbed upon her chair. "Come on-n-n Prince!" she cried*

But Julian, apparently, had determined to punish Mary-Lee for refusing his invitation and accepting Larry's, for he passed the switchboard with frigid politeness, lifting his hat, but never stopping to chat. And Mary-Lee, instead of feeling snubbed, was grateful. She closed her hot, weary eyes and tried to think of the green pastures and spring air down Aqueduct way.

Somehow she fought it out until relief arrived at six o'clock. Then she dragged herself to the sidewalk and turned to ask the doorman to call her a taxi when she suddenly discovered how weak her limbs were. But before the cab came Larry's flivver crawled by.

"That's the tenth time he's done that," muttered the doorman.

"It's all right, Thomas," Mary-Lee told him with a wan little smile. "He's—he's looking for me."

Never was she so glad to see anybody, never so thankful as for the comfort of Larry's flivver!

"Something's happened!" cried Larry, noticing how close to collapse she was. "Has that brute Wentworth—"

"No, Larry." She called him that without noticing. "Foolish, but I feel —a bit under the weather. I guess I've caught a cold."

"Lord! All my fault, keeping you outdoors all day yesterday," he murmured contritely.

"You're not to call yourself names,

please. I caught the cold Saturday with Mr. Wentworth. Had a new gown and didn't want to spoil it by wearing a heavy coat over it. Silly? But it's done. Do you mind stopping at Dr. Sheffield's, in the next block?"

Even in her distress Mary-Lee found it extremely pleasant to have some one as solicitous as Larry was of her comfort and well-being. For she had missed all that, having been orphaned early. Dr. Sheffield wrote her a prescription and ordered her to bed, and next morning she felt well enough to answer the telephone when Larry rang up to inquire. But she didn't go to work that day, reporting sick.

For the next two days Mary-Lee remained indoors, keeping close to her bed. Larry sent jonquils, bright yellow harbingers of spring, which he had bought from a street vendor; and these occupied the place of honor in her room even after Julian Wentworth, suddenly penitent, smothered her with the florist's choicest blooms.

"The Prince misses you—honest injun," Larry said over the wire. "Hurry up and get well and come down to the track to see him."

Julian said, "That new play you were interested in opens next Monday. I've ordered seats, you mustn't miss it."

The weather was glorious and the outdoors beckoned with an allure which Mary-Lee couldn't resist. For the first time she was dissatisfied with her job and viewed the switchboard at the Tudor Arms with something close to positive loathing. So on Thursday, with only a trace of her cold hanging on, Mary-Lee accepted Larry's invitation and drove down to Aqueduct with him in his flivver.

Larry swore that Prince Karl knew her. This time Mary-Lee had brought sugar and carrots, and the docile old thoroughbred poked around in her pockets like a favorite dog. It was pleasant here in the sunshine and fresh air. Mary-Lee sat in the bleachers and watched Larry put the Prince through his paces.

"He's almost ready to race," Larry assured her. "That was a good mile he did to-day. Honest, the old fellow has never worked so fast before."

The racing season in New York opened on Monday, and in both their minds was the same thought—if Prince Karl could only win the first out in Mary-Lee's colors!

Every day Larry was at the track, and Saturday he pronounced the Prince as ready to run the race of his life on Monday. There was still a substitute at the switchboard at the Tudor Arms, for Mary-Lee was too excited to report for work at such a momentous time. She had watched closely the finishing touches to Karl's conditioning, and on Monday was at the track before noon.

MARY-LEE had often thrilled to the scenes of racing on the screen and in fiction; she adored the color and romance of the race course, with its gallant horses, sport-loving men, and beautiful women. Now she was part of this picture, she belonged to the charmed circle, for to-day a thoroughbred of her very own was carrying her colors in the fourth race!

Mary-Lee was dressed in her very best, and women as well as men turned to look a second time at the girl whose eyes were so bright, and whose cheeks were like Southern roses.

"Now, we mustn't hope too much," Larry warned her before the race. "Karl is fit and fast, but there are other horses which have excellent chances to win, too. It's all a gamble,

you understand. Sometimes the best horse doesn't win, either. We've got to have the breaks with us, Mary-Lee."

Larry said "Mary-Lee" in a voice which made her almost believe that she had never heard her name before. Her lovely eyes grew soft and gentle and she turned quickly away, afraid that he would read her secret there.

Then a bugle sounded and the horses came jogging from the paddock to the track, ready to face the barrier. Prince Karl was No. 5, and the jockey in the saddle wore the blue and chestnut blouse and cap which Mary-Lee had chosen for her racing colors. Larry had left her a powerful pair of binoculars, and it was a simple matter to follow No. 5 around the mile oval.

It was all very well to say not to hope too much, but Mary-Lee wouldn't have been human if she hadn't looked for a miracle—a miracle which would bring her colors home in front! This was her horse—her very own—with the blue and chestnut figure on his back. She glanced at the people crowding around her, and wondered if they could hear the mad beating of her heart.

Prince Karl was always well up in the pack. He ran a powerful race after a long winter's rest, but...he didn't win. No. 7 led the field to the wire and No. 5 was second, two lengths back.

It seemed as if Larry was with her almost the minute the winning numbers were displayed on the score board. He was smiling, and so Mary-Lee smiled back. For she felt that Larry was as disappointed as she was—he had worked so hard!

"He'll win soon," Larry whispered, giving her hand a squeeze. "As it is, you've won second money, two hundred dollars, for finishing second, you understand. If Karl had finished first you'd have taken down seven hundred. You can buy a lot of feed for two hundred berries, and on Thursday I'll start him in another race."

Well, that was that. In spite of her disappointment, Mary-Lee wouldn't have missed the experience for anything. And she was an owner! The newspapers reporting the race published: "Prince Karl, second. Owned by Miss Mary-Lee Taylor, trained by Laurence Chester." She saved all these clippings for her scrapbook.

On Tuesday morning Mary-Lee reported back for work. She had been away exactly a week. There was a new girl at the switchboard, but she expected that. What she didn't expect was a notice that her services were no longer required by the telephone company.

"It isn't as if you'd been ill all this time you were away, Miss Taylor," an official told her. "We know you were under the doctor's care for a while. But we also know that you've been at the race track every day since Thursday. It appears you own a horse—"

"Yes," Mary-Lee explained. "Mr. Horton, who lived at the Tudor Arms, left me a horse named Prince Karl when he died. I didn't expect you to pay me for the week I was away—"

The official sat immovable. "I'm sorry," was his only answer.

"I'm sorry, too," Mary-Lee said softly, and walked away.

Overhead the sun was still the color of Larry's jonquils and the May air was a caress. Was she sorry? Yes, sorry for the misunderstanding more than for the loss of her job. She had Prince Karl. He'd win races for her. Life was good—beautiful and full of promise.

Mary-Lee didn't see Larry until evening. He had tried to get her at the

Tudor Arms from the track at noon, and didn't understand what the girl meant when she said Miss Taylor wasn't there. He came on winged feet to her boarding house.

"I'm sorry," he said, looking very serious when Mary-Lee explained the situation. "I am to blame, really. It was all my fault."

"I'm not sorry." She was smiling shyly. "I love the outdoors—racing—Prince Karl. You said he'd win soon, Larry. Well, I'm sticking. I think that is what Uncle Joe wanted me to do—keep the Prince and race him."

She was adorable, so brave and sweet and trusting. Then and there Larry swore that, come Thursday, and a score for the Prince, he'd ask Mary-Lee the most important question of his life. Come Thursday, Karl winning...

LARRY had bad news for Mary-Lee when he met her Wednesday evening. Prince Karl refused to eat and he was running a temperature. A veterinary had been called to look at the horse. Larry wouldn't try to race him again that week.

"It's all in the game," he told Mary-Lee, trying to be cheerful—but he felt anything else himself. Thursday would have meant so much to him—so much; and now, with the Prince's ailment it could only mean another day.

They went to "Happyland" and danced that evening. Never had Mary-Lee looked sweeter, more desirable, and to hold her in his arms was an exquisite pain scarcely to be born. The music throbbed a haunting waltz, and Larry's lips could almost touch the soft brown hair so tantalizingly near. It required all his manhood to choke back the wild, sweet words which trembled on his tongue.

But it wouldn't be right—be fair to her—to ask Mary-Lee to share his life when he had so little to offer her. Manlike, Larry wanted to give the girl he loved the moon, the stars, the world and everything beautiful in it. It was all very well to say Mary-Lee didn't expect — nor desire! — such extravagances. He was in love for the first time, and this girl in his arms represented all the dreams he had cherished from boyhood.

The Prince didn't come round after his recent indisposition as quickly as Larry had hoped, and he was obliged to let up on his training. Mary-Lee bore this new disappointment bravely, but as the days passed she started out secretly to look for work again. She wasn't an experienced stenographer, and presently she sought the shops, seeking a position as salesgirl.

It was after a long, trying day, with her thoughts constantly down on Long Island, that she met Julian Wentworth once more. He strolled down the street just as she came up the block, home to her boarding house to rest her weary feet.

It was the first time she had seen Julian since she lost her position at the Tudor Arms.

"I took a sudden trip to Bermuda," he explained. "Had the shock of my life when I came home and found another girl at the switchboard. What's wrong, Mary-Lee? I wrote to you, but of course you never received my letters. Come to dinner with me and tell me all about it."

She hesitated. She had been having dinner every night with Larry upon his return from the track, but of course there was no definite engagement.

Julian saw her hesitate, and drew her hand through his arm.

"You must trust an old friend," he said. "Now, out with it."

At the table, with its snowy cloth, shining silver and delicate china, Mary-Lee told him what had happened. She wasn't complaining—oh, no! The breaks were against her and Larry, that was all. She was sorry about the misunderstanding with the telephone company, but probably it was her own fault. However, she just had to be at the track to see Prince Karl; and she glanced at Julian, hoping he'd understand.

He said he did. And then he commenced.

"MARY-LEE," he began, reaching for her hand, "I want you to marry me. I love you so. I want to protect you from all the winds of disappointment in life. You're too young and beautiful to struggle along against the tide, taking the worst of it all the time. Prince Karl—I've told you he was worthless, dear. And Laurence Chester—"

He hesitated and Mary-Lee asked quickly, "What about Larry?"

"A nice fellow, darling, but scarcely capable. I mean as a trainer. If Prince Karl were another Man o' War, Chester couldn't make him win races. Now, I'm not saying a word against the fellow's character; it's simply that he doesn't know his business. You see for yourself he has never been able to get other horses to train. Can't make the grade, that's all. You'd better let your husband pay him off and be done with this folly."

"Pay him off?" gasped Mary-Lee, with a sudden sinking of her heart.

"Yes, little innocent," answered Julian. "It costs money to feed and train a horse, even such a worthless hide as the Prince. What about Chester's wages?"

"Julian!" She went as white as a sheet. "Of course! What an idiot I am! Do you know I never gave a thought to—salary—"

"Of course you didn't, darling. Nor feed bills nor the veterinary's fee. It all runs up into real money, Mary-Lee. You are such a precious little innocent—"

"Idiot, you mean," Mary-Lee said, rising from the table. "What must Larry think of me?"

"The fellow knows you haven't any money, probably," announced Wentworth. "If you want my honest opinion that is what is wrong with your horse. You haven't paid your bills, and Chester isn't bothering much with training."

"Not Larry," Mary-Lee said emphatically.

"How do you know? You seem to be pretty well acquainted with the fellow!"

"I think I understand Mr. Chester better than I understand you, Julian," Mary-Lee told Wentworth. "For you say you love me and yet you do everything you know how to hurt me and humiliate my friends. You say the unkindest things in the guise of friendship. Larry Chester is true blue, and if he hasn't won races with Prince Karl it is because the horse has been sick—"

"That's what Chester told you. How do you know? How do you explain his unbusinesslike method of dealing with you? I'll tell you what I think. You owe him money and you can't pay him—"

"He's never asked me for a cent. And, idiot that I am, I never thought—"

"He will ask you. And when he does and you can't pay he'll attach your horse for debt."

"But why should he do that?" demanded Mary-Lee shrewdly. "You've told me several times now that Karl is

worthless. What does Larry Chester want with him, then?"

Julian found himself flushing angrily. "Oh, he can probably sell him for a thousand or so."

"And you think Larry would do this to me for a thousand dollars?" asked Mary-Lee. She was trembling, but her lovely head went back and she laughed in Wentworth's face. "You know little about human nature. You must think I'm blind, gullible. Putting two and two together, I'm beginning to understand you better. You've never loved me, for love is simple and kind and honest. Good evening, Mr. Wentworth. Don't trouble to ring me up again."

BUT Mary-Lee was feeling far less brave than her words when she saw Larry again. This business of life was a serious thing. Money may be vulgar, but it is very necessary.

"Larry," she began, coming at once to the point, "what must you think of me? To permit all these weeks to slip by without saying a word to you about expenses—"

"Who has been mentioning expenses to you?" Larry cut in. "Never you mind about expenses now," he told her. "Bills are never due until the first of the month... Which reminds me—there's two hundred due you for that second Prince Karl ran the other day."

"Keep it toward what I already owe, Larry," she protested feebly.

"I will not. We can square accounts after the Prince has won for you."

Mary-Lee sighed. "Will he ever win a race, Larry?"

"What? Treason? Men have been hanged for less," he assured her with mock gravity. "Of course Karl is going to win a race. I'm going to start him on Saturday. Watch his dust."

On Saturday! Could she last that long? Mary-Lee was dubious. She must find work. However small, any salary was better than no money.

Well, Saturday was another day, and while Larry had only mentioned the fact that Prince Karl was entered in the sixth race of the afternoon, Mary-Lee couldn't remain away. It wasn't his fault if he couldn't win for her. A visit to the stable established the fact that the Prince remembered her and wanted his sugar, as usual. How could she bring herself to part with such an affectionate friend? And yet—if he didn't win to-day—

As Mary-Lee was turning away, Larry came hurrying up, his tanned, handsome face wreathed with smiles. He had some money in his hand which he pressed into Mary-Lee's palm.

"The two hundred—for Karl's running second the other day," he explained, and then was away again, about his business, before she could protest.

For Larry couldn't lie to Mary-Lee. He had never lied to her about the horse. In the beginning he had believed that the Prince would win races. Now he wasn't so sure, and so he said little. For instance, Mary-Lee was never to know that this two hundred quite swept away his little bank balance, Prince Karl's second money having been exhausted for bills long ago.

Mary-Lee took the notes and went into the grand stand to watch the races. The Prince was slated to go in the last event on the program. Until then she merely sat and waited.

BUT finally the bugle sounded for the nightcap, and Mary-Lee, nervous, hoping against hope, left her seat and walked down on the lawn. The horses were coming on the

track; again Karl wore No. 5. His satin coat glistened and he fairly danced along, as if keenly relishing the job on hand.

A mist came before Mary-Lee's lovely eyes. As she turned away, a bookmaker's clerk asked her surreptitiously if she wished to make a bet. Quick as a flash she answered:

"Yes! I want to bet on that beautiful chestnut—No. 5, he is."

The man consulted his slip. "No. 5—that's Prince Karl. All right, lady. His odds are twenty to one. How much do you want to bet?"

Mary-Lee's palm opened and she showed the man the roll of bills which Larry had given her.

"Well, I've two hundred dollars..."

"All right. That's four thousand to two hundred, madam. Sign your name on this slip, please. That's it."

They were obliged to work fast, for the horses were approaching the barrier. The clerk hurried to his chief, satisfied that he had put through a good bet, for the handicappers didn't give Prince Karl a chance to win.

As for Mary-Lee, she was almost afraid to think of what she had done. If the Prince didn't win—and she lost that two hundred—what could she say to Larry? What would she do...but call upon Julian Wentworth?

She fought her way back into the crowded stand.

"They're off!" arose the hysterical scream as the horses left the wire.

Larry hadn't given her his field glasses; probably he hadn't thought it was necessary to-day. It was Karl's first race in some time. But Mary-Lee's eyes, sharp with love, didn't require the binoculars. She followed her blue and chestnut silks every yard of the journey.

His jockey had got the old horse away well and kept him with the pack from the start. Through the back stretch she could see him running strongly, sticking close to the leaders, and then when the front runner faltered the Prince moved up and presently he was in second position. But they didn't win races by running second. Mary-Lee would never collect her bet unless the Prince scampered home all alone.

Scarcely realizing what she did, Mary-Lee climbed upon her chair and commenced to urge the flashy chestnut on.

"Come on, Prince!" she called. "Prince Karl! Prince Karl! Co-ome on-n-n!"

The horses had reached the home lane now, the Prince running second to an animal called Buttonhook. The Prince was coming gamely, with no give up in his mind, but Buttonhook stuck doggedly to his task, and for a moment Mary-Lee was sick with despair. She beat one palm with the fist of her other hand. Again she called on her color-bearer:

"Oh, Karl, run—run faster, honey! Catch him—catch him, Karl! For my sake—and Larry's."

Perhaps the old horse heard her. Afterward Larry swore that the Prince knew he had done a good job. Anyway, Karl made a final run at Buttonhook, giving his very best as the little jockey drove with hands and heels. Slowly, surely, he drew up on his rival. Now they were racing neck to neck. Mary-Lee couldn't scream—couldn't move. Her hands were cold, her head hot. She saw Karl make a supreme effort and gradually his handsome chestnut head pushed its way in front. And there it stayed until the finish of the race.

There was one agonizing moment

for Mary-Lee until she saw his number —No. 5—flashed on the board as the winner. Then, laughing, sobbing, she squeezed her way out of the grand stand and ran down to the rail by the judges' pagoda just in time to greet Larry.

HE looked so proud! "Congratulations," he whispered with a flash of his white teeth. "I wasn't so sure, Mary-Lee, but ... well, Karl has redeemed himself. I only wish Mr. Wentworth could have been here to see his game race."

"I'm so happy!" Mary-Lee clung to his arm. But a man came up and spoke to him and then he had to go away with this friend, leaving Mary-Lee to accompany the groom to Prince Karl's stable. She made a charming picture when Larry returned a little later, with the old horse following her for his reward of sugar.

As for Larry, he was beaming.

"Mary-Lee," he said without preliminaries, "would you like to live in Chicago for a while? It's a great town, and you'll love the lake and the beaches. That was Mr. Shelby who wanted to talk to me. He renewed his offer for me to train his stable of racers—ten thousand a year, dearest, and I'm to have the right to train the Prince as well! That's quite a concession, Mary-Lee. You see, before he wouldn't hear of my taking Prince Karl with his horses."

Mary-Lee's eyes became moist. "So that's why you didn't go to Chicago before!"

"Because I love you more than a ten thousand dollar job—yes, Mary-Lee."

Her smile was like an April sun struggling through showery clouds.

"Say that again, Larry."

"I'm going to keep on saying it all the rest of our lives, my precious darling. Oh, Mary-Lee, I'm not a failure! I've won for you and landed a fat job. I can ask you to marry me now."

"Couldn't you have asked me that before, dear?" she whispered archly.

"You little witch! Mary-Lee, do you know from the minute I first saw you, you've upset my plans most alarmingly? Horses were my love, not girls. I didn't plan to marry for—oh, years and years! But who could resist you? You're lovely, adorable, Mary-Lee."

"And I'm not a poor little nobody, either," she chuckled, her arm through his. "Oh, Larry, I've done something terrible—or it would have been terrible if Karl hadn't won. I took that money—that two hundred—and... I bet every penny of it on the Prince!"

"You did—what?"

"Yes. The bookmaker gave me twenty to one on our horse, darling, so that makes four thousand dollars I've won, doesn't it?"

His astonishment gave way to a howl of delight at her cleverness.

"Now that you're an heiress, I suppose you won't want to associate with poor folk," he joked. "Why, I hadn't a penny on Karl!"

"I don't believe you had a penny after you gave me the two hundred," said Mary-Lee. "Anyway, if it was money I wanted," she added demurely, "I would have married Julian Wentworth long ago."

"And you didn't want money, you wanted—say it, sweetheart?"

"I wanted you, Larry," she whispered, very sweet and serious. "I love only you, dear heart. Oh, how little Uncle Joe Horton dreamed what happiness he was bringing into the heart of Mary-Lee when he bequeathed me Prince Karl—and King Larry!"

# His Princess of Blushes

By Elmer M. Lewis

*The next instant she had sunk in a heap at his feet*

*Marjorie's telltale cheeks were the bane of her existence until their signal of love brought the man of her dreams*

MARJORIE JOYCE'S nimble fingers stopped clattering over the keyboard of her typewriter as Beatrice Cummings came to a pause beside her desk.

"Jimmy arrived home yesterday," announced Beatrice, her eyes sparkling. "Now we can give our eyes a treat."

Marjorie's large, Spanish-dark eyes assumed an injured expression, and her perfect little rosebud of a mouth pouted adorably.

"So you've been holding out on me," she accused. "Who is this marvelous Jimmy person?"

"Don't pull that injured dignity pose on me, because I know you don't

mean it," laughed Beatrice. "But I forgot that you've been employed here only a month. Naturally you haven't met James Garvin, the head of this firm, as he's been abroad. Among ourselves we call him Jimmy."

"Oh-h-h," gasped Marjorie, a wave of color flooding her cheeks. She hadn't thought Beatrice referred to that particular Jimmy, not dreaming that any of the girls would speak so familiarly of Mr. Garvin; though she herself had secretly thought of him as Jimmy ever since Beatrice had told her about the wonderful young man who owned the business, and had shown her his picture in a newspaper.

Since then Marjorie had indulged in many dreams in which Jimmy enacted the part of Prince Charming, and she the part of Cinderella. She looked forward with shy expectancy toward seeing him when he returned from abroad.

Beatrice gazed at her admiringly. "Gosh, kid," she exclaimed. "You look sweet when you blush, and how easily you do it. If I didn't know you hadn't met the boss I'd think you had a crush on him."

"As though he'd even look at me," retorted Marjorie, laughing in an effort to hide her confusion.

Just then her buzzer summoned her to the office of the manager, whose stenographic work she was doing temporarily during the illness of his secretary. As she entered his private office, notebook and pencil in hand, Marjorie saw Jason Hughes, the bookkeeper, standing by the manager's desk.

Marjorie looked at Jason doubtfully. "I thought Mr. Benson rang for me," she said.

"I rang," replied Jason, smiling ingratiatingly. "Mr. Benson has gone to the bank, and I thought this would be a good opportunity for you and I to have a little chat."

As Jason talked, his hands toyed nervously with a package of yellow-backed fifty-dollar bills that lay on the desk.

"I don't wish to talk with you," Marjorie retorted, tossing her head indignantly.

JASON had annoyed Marjorie with his attentions since the first day she had come to work in the office. She disliked him, and her aversion was increased by the fact that he had green eyes. Marjorie had always contended that the man she loved must have blue eyes, and she was more positive than ever on this point since she had learned that Jimmy Garvin had eyes of the deepest blue.

The yellow-backed bank notes still clutched in his hand, Jason stepped quickly to Marjorie's side. His arms went round her hungrily.

"Why do you always repulse me?" he demanded hoarsely. "You know I'm crazy about you. How about dinner to-night, and afterward a dance?"

His lips sought hers as she strove futilely to escape his embrace.

"No, no!" Marjorie managed to gasp. "I despise you."

The door opened and Mr. Benson walked briskly in.

"Here, here, what's the meaning of this?" he inquired in surprise.

Jason hastily released Marjorie and faced the office manager, extending the package of bank notes.

"This money is the reason," he said respectfully. "I entered your office just in time to see Miss Joyce take the package of bank notes from your desk. Not knowing I had seen her take the bills, she kept them concealed in her hand. When I suggested that she had

better put the money back, she denied indignantly that she had taken it. I was just taking it away from her when you came in."

"Oh, I never—" Marjorie began tearfully.

"That will do, young lady," said Mr. Benson sternly. "I myself saw Jason take the money from you, therefore you must have had it in your possession."

"I grieve to say it," spoke up Jason unctuously, "but a girl like that should be arrested as an example. It might keep some other poor girl from straying from the path of rectitude."

"An excellent idea," assented Benson. "I might yet decide to have you arrested, young lady. In the meantime, get your hat and coat and clear out."

Marjorie looked at Mr. Benson pleadingly, but his face was adamant, so with bowed head and tear-stained cheeks she walked from the office.

Marjorie realized that Jason had accused her falsely of theft in order to save himself from a reprimand for annoying her with his amorous advances, and partly also with a desire for revenge because she had repulsed him every time he had attempted to become familiar.

In the cloak room she bathed her eyes in cold water to remove all traces of weeping, then, putting on her hat and coat, left by a side door. She just couldn't bear to face the girls in the main office and say good-by, in view of the explanations she would be forced to make.

At the subway news-stand Marjorie bought several papers, realizing she would have to read the advertisements and get another job as quickly as possible.

Marjorie was going through her third paper, seated in the subway express, when this advertisement struck her eye:

> Wanted—Sensible, unmarried young woman, nineteen or twenty, willing to take a chance, for an unusual proposition. No flappers need apply. Phone Washington Square 6000.

Marjorie's eyes sparkled with repressed excitement.

"Oh, I wonder—" she murmured. But her thought was left unfinished as she noticed that the train was pulling into her station. Jumping to her feet, she hurried through the car.

AS Marjorie passed through the door of the car, she collided with a young man who came running down the platform. The force of the impact whirled her around and she sank in a heap at his feet.

The young man stared at her in dismay, then sprang to assist her as she attempted to struggle to her feet.

"Gosh, I'm sorry," he exclaimed contritely. "Awfully clumsy of me. Are you hurt?"

"N-no. Just shaken up a little." For a moment Marjorie clung dizzily to his arm. She was thinking how positively good-looking he was. And he had blue eyes! The thought sent a wave of color into her cheeks. She hastily released her grip on his arm.

The young man's eyes gleamed with admiration. "By jove, I thought it was a lost art," he murmured.

"What?" asked Marjorie, giving him a startled look.

"Blushing," he smiled. "Nowadays girls don't blush very easily."

Marjorie turned her face away from him. She could feel her cheeks grow hot, and knew she was blushing worse than ever. She was furious at him for

making her blush, and furious at herself for not being able to control her emotions. Yet she was conscious of a pleasant feeling, a sort of warmth inside.

"Oh, I've made you miss your train," she cried, to hide her confusion.

*"It can't be me," breathed Marjorie*

The lights of the train were disappearing down the tunnel.

"Don't worry your little head about that. Anyway, I've changed my mind. I'm going to take a taxi." He grasped her arm firmly. "Come, you must let me help you up to the street. I'm sure your head is still in a whirl."

As they ascended the stairs, the touch of the young man's hand on Marjorie's arm thrilled her. She marveled that she should be so affected by a perfect stranger.

The young man hailed a taxi.

"You must let me drop you off wherever you are going," he insisted, with a frank, boyish smile. "I owe it to you after treating you so roughly."

For just an instant Marjorie hesitated, as her eyes met his smiling frankly into her own.

"Thank you," she murmured softly, "I will."

Marjorie had just got into the cab when the young man, who had glanced casually up the street, turned an alarmed face toward the chauffeur.

"Get going!" he commanded. "Quick!" With that he leaped in beside Marjorie and slammed the door.

Marjorie caught a glimpse of a pretty girl, attractively dressed, running toward the car as it started from the curb.

"Stop!" the strange girl cried, gesticulating wildly. "I must see you."

But the car shot into the stream of traffic, leaving her standing impotently on the sidewalk.

"PHEW! That was a narrow squeak," grinned Marjorie's escort.

"I don't see anything funny about it," retorted the girl coldly. "If that was your wife—"

The young man eyed her in surprise, then laughed heartily.

"You wrong me," he chuckled. "I am as free as the air. That young lady who attempted to stop the taxi is by way of being a nuisance, but I assure you that she hasn't the slightest claim on me. Sorry I can't tell you all the sordid details now."

"I'm sorry," said Marjorie impulsively, laying her hand on his arm. "I didn't mean to pry into your private affairs."

The young man's eyes rested tenderly on the little white hand on his arm, then lighted with interest.

"What a quaint ring," he said, touching diffidently the odd dragon's head ring, with two emeralds for eyes, that Marjorie wore on the middle finger of her right hand.

"And that little blue mark on your finger just above the ring," he added seriously, "looks just as though a turquoise had become dislodged from the ring and come to rest on your finger."

Marjorie averted her eyes in confusion, the telltale color creeping into her cheeks.

"What, again?" he laughed, admiringly. "I shall have to call you my Princess of Blushes. Which reminds me, what *is* your name?"

"Marjorie Joyce," she answered, after a brief hesitation. After all, she thought, what did it matter. She would never see the charming stranger again. A bitter regret filled her that this was to be the end.

He leaned toward her, just as the taxi pulled up to the curb.

"A sweet name, and a sweeter girl," he murmured softly. "My name is James Garvin—Jimmy to you."

"Oh-o-o!" exclaimed Marjorie, turning her startled eyes full on Jimmy's face. No wonder he had seemed strangely familiar! He was *the* James Garvin! Many a time she had gazed admiringly at his picture in the newspaper clipping Beatrice had shown her.

The cab door opened, and she hastily stepped to the sidewalk.

"Good-by, and thank you for the ride," she said.

"Good-by, my Princess of Blushes, until we meet again," Jimmy's laughing voice floated back to her as the taxi rolled away.

It was in something of a daze that Marjorie let herself into the house and climbed the stairs to the room she shared with Beatrice Cummings. To her surprise, Beatrice was in.

"I left early, right after talking with you at the office," Beatrice explained in answer to Marjorie's query. Then, noticing Marjorie's woebegone countenance: "Not sick, deary? Of course, you didn't—"

"That's just it, I did," nodded Marjorie grimly. "I got fired." Angry tears flooding her eyes, she poured the injustice of her dismissal into Beatrice's sympathetic ears.

"Gosh, kid, I'm sorry. You surely got a tough break," Beatrice consoled, putting her arm around Marjorie affectionately. "If I didn't have my own job to think about I'd give Jason a piece of my mind to-morrow. You can bet your sweet life it wouldn't have happened if Jimmy Garvin had been home. They wouldn't try to put anything over on that baby."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," burst out Marjorie excitedly, a radiant smile transforming her tear-stained face, like the soft, warm rays of the sun emerging from behind a dark cloud. With shining eyes she described her adventure in the subway, and her surprise at learning that the young man was Jimmy Garvin.

Beatrice listened enviously. "Talk about luck," she exclaimed. "I'll bet the big boss has fallen for you. Just play your cards right..."

"Nonsense," laughed Marjorie, flushing. "I'll never see him again. What I need to think of is a job."

"Of course. But that doesn't necessarily mean that you can't see lots of each other."

THEN Marjorie told Beatrice of the advertisement she had read in the subway. "You know, I'm just consumed with curiosity. If it wasn't for that 'no flapper' restriction I'd go after the job. But they'd hear me 'flapping' the minute they saw me."

"Why, I think it is perfectly thrilling," exclaimed Beatrice. She surveyed Marjorie critically. "As for that flapper part, I'll take care of that." Her eyes rested meditatively on her friend's golden hair.

Marjorie's hand flew instinctively to her wavy locks in a gesture of protection. "Beatrice Cummings," she flared, "don't you dare suggest cutting my hair. Jimmy—"

"Oh, so we do think of our Jimmy, after all," mocked Beatrice. "But don't worry, I won't cut your precious hair. Long may it wave for the delectation of Jimmy's handsome blue eyes."

"I think you're perfectly horrid," cried Marjorie, crimson to the roots of her hair.

"And I think you're too sweet for anything," retorted Beatrice, eying her approvingly. "Any girl who can blush like that on the slightest provocation, or without provocation at all, deserves to draw from love's lottery nothing less than a millionaire."

Marjorie kissed her friend impulsively. "Don't mind me, Beatrice, I knew you were only teasing. And now I'm going downstairs to call up the mysterious advertiser."

"Atta girl," replied Beatrice.

There was a telephone in the hallway downstairs. This Marjorie used, and was back in the room inside of ten minutes.

"Well," she laughed nervously. "I've got the appointment, and I'm so scared I don't know whether to be glad or sorry. It's an apartment on Park Avenue, and I'm to ask for Nanette."

"Fine! Now I'll show you how to take the 'flap' out of 'flapper.' When I get through with you you won't know yourself."

Waving aside Marjorie's half-hearted protests, Beatrice set to work with deft fingers. She began on Marjorie's face, removing all trace of rouge and lip stick. Then she applied powder of a certain shade, until Marjorie appeared pale and rather sallow-looking.

"Fine," she gloated, surveying her handicraft. "You look like a good prospect for a tuberculosis ward in a hospital. Now for the hair."

Beatrice seized a comb from the dresser, and dampening Marjorie's hair so the wave would come out easily, combed her hair straight back from her forehead and tied it in a knot at the back of her head.

Then from the closet Beatrice brought forth a dress she had discarded a long time ago. It didn't quite fit Marjorie, and was much too long, but this only added to the effect that Beatrice sought to produce.

"Now for the finishing touch," cried Beatrice enthusiastically. She was having a good time, even though Marjorie didn't appear to be enjoying herself. From a dresser drawer Bea-

trice produced a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"There is just plain window glass in these," she said, "but they give the finishing touch to a work of art. Honest, Marj, if I met you on the street I'd pass you by as a stranger!"

Marjorie gazed at her reflection in the mirror in consternation. She saw a girl that was neatly dressed, but plain, serious, and unattractive. One who obviously didn't wear the proper clothes, nor take the proper care of her face and hair. Decidedly, the girl she saw in the mirror could not be accused of being a flapper.

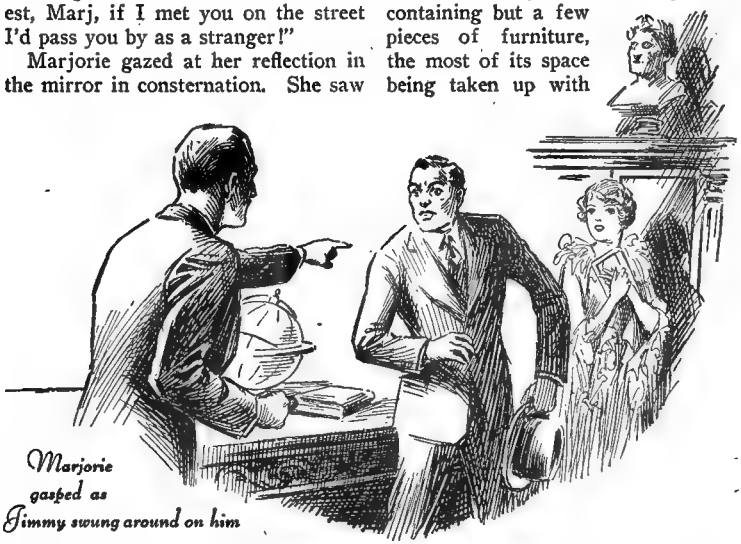
"Oh, I'd never believe it," breathed Marjorie, her lips parted in astonishment.

THE next morning, before going to the office, Beatrice supervised Marjorie's new style of dress and make-up, to make sure that nothing was overlooked.

At precisely ten o'clock Marjorie presented herself at the Park Avenue apartment and inquired for Nanette.

"I am Nanette," smiled the maid who opened the door. "The gentleman who advertised will be here in a few minutes."

She led Marjorie into a large room containing but a few pieces of furniture, the most of its space being taken up with books and works of art. Evidently a man's room, one with expensive but excellent taste.



*Marjorie gasped as Jimmy swung around on him*

A man's voice came to her through the doorway, and the next instant the mysterious advertiser entered the room. Marjorie, who had been nervously watching the door, rose hastily to her feet, her hands closed convulsively. Her face grew hot as it flooded with color, which she prayed fervently wouldn't show through her powder. The man she faced was Jimmy Garvin!

"I'm sorry, young lady," he began, "but—" He broke off and gazed at her, a puzzled look in his eyes. For an instant he gazed at her right hand, and his forehead wrinkled thoughtfully.

Then he turned, walked over to the wall and stared at a painting by one of the old masters. As abruptly as he had turned away, he walked back to Marjorie.

"I think you'll do," he said gruffly.

"I thought the position was taken," exclaimed Marjorie. "You said you were sorry—"

"So it is—by you," smiled Jimmy. "But perhaps you won't want it."

"Oh, but I do," pleaded Marjorie. "I need a position ever so much." She wondered if Jimmy recognized her, but of course he couldn't have or he would have shown it.

Jimmy smiled grimly. "There happens to be a certain young lady who has decided to force me to marry her. She obtrudes herself upon my company at every opportunity, and under the most embarrassing circumstances. All the time she is endeavoring to convey the impression that there is something between us, which is absolutely untrue. I've never been in the young lady's company alone, and now I am even avoiding my friends for fear I'll run into her."

"How dreadful," murmured Marjorie sympathetically. "Couldn't you have her arrested?"

"I have thought of that," Jimmy smiled wryly, "but somehow I shrink from the attendant publicity. Hence the advertisement. I decided if I could get a plain, respectable girl with whom I wouldn't fall in love, and who wouldn't pretend to fall in love with me, I would offer her five thousand dollars to marry me. With the proviso, of course, that she would permit a divorce at any time I desired. Once married, the young lady who has been persecuting me, being without the basis for a breach of promise suit, would cease to annoy me. Then, after a decent interval, my wife in name only could secure a quiet divorce. I'd be free and safe, and she would be five thousand dollars richer."

"You want me to — marry you?" faltered Marjorie, her big, dark eyes opened wide in startled unbelief.

Jimmy's white teeth flashed in a quick smile. "Precisely. And now that you have heard the worst, what is your decision? Will you take the job?"

"Yes," Marjorie heard herself say in a voice that sounded very weak.

"Fine! I certainly appreciate your looking at the affair in the right light and helping me out of a hole. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll call the minister who is waiting in the next room. He's a friend of mine, and understands the circumstances."

"Now! Oh, no," protested Marjorie in consternation, looking down at her drab, ill-fitting dress.

"Nonsense," laughed Jimmy, interpreting her look. "You look perfectly all right, and we want to get this business over. Afterward I'll give you carte blanche and you can go on an orgy of shopping."

Waving his hand in a gesture that signified that the matter was settled, Jimmy stepped through the doorway into the adjoining room.

MARJORIE'S heart thumped so maddeningly that she was sure the front of her dress moved. Waves of color chased each other across her cheeks. She felt sure her blushes would show through the overdose of powder that covered her face and betray her identity to Jimmy.

She wanted to back out, yet something within her held her back. Here she was, about to marry the man of her dreams, a man whose picture she

had greatly admired, and with whom she had fallen in love the one time she had met him in person. And the man didn't know that she had worked in his office, that she was the girl he had knocked off her feet in the subway—he didn't even know her name. To Jimmy she was just a piece of merchandise, to be discarded when its usefulness was over.

She flushed at the thought. In her dreams she had pictured herself marrying Jimmy, but certainly not under the present conditions.

Instinctively Marjorie took a lip stick from her bag, but halfway to her lips her hand paused, and reluctantly she returned it to the bag. No lip stick for her! She must not forget that she was no longer beautiful, seductive Marjorie Joyce, but plain, drab Madge Joy. This latter name she had decided to use, as the initials were the same as her own.

Her thoughts were dispelled by the sound of voices, and Jimmy, accompanied by a middle-aged man in clerical garb, entered the room.

"Are you ready, my dear?" inquired Jimmy with a reassuring smile.

Arising, Marjorie looked searchingly at Jimmy through her horn-rimmed spectacles. Did her over-wrought imagination detect an ardent note in the bridegroom's voice?

In a daze Marjorie stood beside Jimmy as the minister married them. She wondered curiously why the minister should mumble her name so as to be unintelligible, but attached no great importance to it at the time. She was thinking how wonderful it would be if Jimmy loved her and they were really getting married, and not merely going through the mockery of marriage for convenience.

As the minister concluded, Jimmy impulsively clasped Marjorie in his arms and bent his head to kiss her.

"My wife," he cried, an exultant note in his voice.

Marjorie shrank from him. "No, no—please," she pleaded. She just couldn't stand his arms about her. She'd simply have to tell him how much she loved him. Then Jimmy would look at her pallid features and frumpy clothes, and laugh. Marjorie couldn't bear the thought of Jimmy's ridicule, and though she yearned to feel his arms crush her tightly to him, she pushed him from her.

Jimmy stepped back. "I beg your pardon," he said coldly. "The beauty of the marriage service led me to overlook the fact that this is a marriage of convenience, and not for—love."

The telephone rang, and with a muttered apology, Jimmy went to answer it. In a moment he returned.

"I must go to the office at once," he said. "I have to go out of town on business, and shall probably not return before to-morrow. I am sorry that this had to happen—on our wedding night."

For a moment he gazed at Marjorie silently, but she was so bewildered from the events of the past hour that she was speechless. Then, without another word, Jimmy turned and strode from the room.

Marjorie heard his footsteps grow fainter and a door shut in the distance. Apparently he had gone to his room to pack a bag. Presently he returned, passed the door without a glance, and Marjorie heard the outer door open and shut.

SUDDENLY she felt weak, and very, very tired. She found a button in the wall, and pressed it. In a moment Nanette appeared.

"Nanette," she said, hesitatingly. "I wonder if you'd mind showing me my room."

"Oh, but certainly. It is a pleasure," smiled the pretty little French maid.

Marjorie followed Nanette to the room she was to occupy, a dainty, exquisite bedroom. She wondered, flushing at the thought, how her husband could have had the forethought to furnish such a room for his unknown bride.

"In the wardrobe," said Nanette softly, "there is lingerie and negligees, but as for clothes"—she shrugged her pretty shoulders—"madame must of a necessity go shopping. If I may be permitted to assist—"

"Thank you, Nanette. If I need you I will ring."

Marjorie had married Jimmy. She knew she loved him, but, of course, he didn't love her—he couldn't, the perfect fright she looked. Her heart contracted, but in spite of the way she felt, or perhaps because of it, she intended to keep to her part of the bargain.

But to-night was hers, she was free to do as she liked. And above all she wanted to be her natural self. The sight of her frumpy figure in the mirror sickened her.

A quick search brought to light the lingerie, and a pink chiffon negligee, frothy with cobwebby lace. With the dainty garments in her arms, she sought the bathroom.

In another hour an entirely different Marjorie stared approvingly at herself in the mirror. Her mouth parted, like a half opened rosebud, in amazement that the person she saw in the glass could be herself, that she could be so beautiful. If Jimmy only saw her now... She flushed at the thought and pulled the fragile chiffon folds of the negligee closer about her slim young body.

She decided to slip down to the room in which she had been married, secure a book, and come back and make the most of her temporary luxury.

But in the act of taking a book from the bookcase, her body stiffened and an icy shiver ran through her as a familiar voice reached her from the entrance hall.

"If you want to keep my love," the voice said persuasively, "you must do as I say. Turn away all the girls but the one I send. Once she gets her hooks into Jimmy Garvin she can bleed him plenty."

"Oh, but no, I couldn't," she heard Nanette protest. "Also, it is too late. Monsieur Garvin is married."

"You don't mean—" he broke off with an ejaculation of surprise.

Marjorie, frozen in her tracks, saw staring at her in dumfounded amazement through the doorway the evil face of Jason Hughes, whose false accusation had caused her to lose her position!

A gloating smile slowly wreathed Jason's thick lips.

"This is luck," he said softly. "So, after getting fired, you decided to marry the boss. Well, if you don't want me to give you away, you've got to split fifty-fifty with me. As a start, I want five hundred dollars to-morrow!"

"Oh, you mustn't," cried Marjorie frantically.

"Then have the money for me the next time I call," Jason directed in a tone of finality.

"But I can't," Marjorie protested. "Where would I get five hundred dollars?"

Jason grinned evilly. "Don't pretend to be so innocent. Vamp friend

hubby and he'll give you anything you want, then you divide with me. Simple, isn't it?"

Marjorie drew herself up indignantly. "Certainly not! You are asking me to blackmail my husband, and I refuse."

"Then take the consequences," Jason snapped vindictively. "Of course, I know you're innocent, but—"

"So do I," interrupted a voice coldly.

JASON wheeled in alarm, to meet Jimmy Garvin's eyes fixed on him sternly.

"I arrived just in time to hear the last part of your conversation," said Jimmy. "I have just come from the office, where I had a very interesting talk with this young lady's roommate. What I learned has been largely substantiated by the manager, who admitted that he was hasty in dismissing Miss Joyce on your bare statement. I feel justified in discharging you."

The courage oozed from Jason at Jimmy's belligerent attitude, and he turned and fled from the room.

"My Prineess of Blushes," smiled Jimmy, turning to Marjorie. "So we meet again. I presume you are calling on my wife."

"No—yes, that is, I must go now. Really, I'm in an awful hurry," Marjorie said incoherently. Embarrassment suffused her cheeks with waves of color as she nervously drew the folds of her chiffon negligee closer about her slim young beauty.

Jimmy laughed softly. "Am I to infer that you traveled here in that very attractive, but wholly unsubstantial costume?" he inquired quizzically.

Painfully self-conscious, Marjorie averted her flushed face. "Yes, yes—please let me go." She strove to pass, but Jimmy grasped her wrist tightly. He pointed to the dragon's head ring, with the two emeralds for eyes, on the third finger of Marjorie's right hand.

"My wife's ring," he said sternly, though his mouth twitched with a repressed smile.

Marjorie stared at the ring in dismay. At her genuine distress, Jimmy's eyes softened contritely. The next instant his arms closed hungrily about her, crushing her to him.

"You adorable little fraud," he murmured between kisses. "Do you think I don't know you are the girl I just married? After meeting you in the subway I knew that no one who answered my advertisement would do, that you were the girl I wanted for my wife. When you came this morning I had a license in my pocket and was going to find you and try and persuade you to marry me. Something hauntingly familiar about you, combined with the ring and the little blue mark on your finger just above it, convinced me that you were my dream girl, the girl in the taxi. So I married you under your real name, instructing the minister to mumble your name so you wouldn't catch on. I wanted to make you love me before telling you the truth."

His eyes dwelt yearningly on her averted face. "I've kissed your hair, your eyes, your cheek," he murmured softly, "but if you'd just turn your sweet little lips to mine...you do love me, sweetheart, don't you?"

"Oh, I do, I do," breathed Marjorie, yielding her rose-petal lips to his, "but I'm so happy I can't believe it. It's like a dream."

"Then dream on, dearest, and love me always," murmured Jimmy, as his lips found hers and clung.

# Planets of Destiny

Professor GUSTAVE MEYER, Conductor

*BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.*

*One question is allowed each reader—if an answer by mail is requested, inclose ten cents in stamps or money order to cover cost of mailing. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.*

*It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.*

People have first to know you quite well to like you, Miss E. A. B., born January 5, 1898. Perhaps you will disagree with me when I say that you have had opportunities to marry before this, but I maintain that your own overcritical and aloof nature has thus far prevented. I will not undertake to say whether you will marry. I can, however, tell you that late 1932 or early 1933 look propitious for romance. Your Sun was in Capricorn, and the Zodiacal signs Libra and Scorpio were on the ascendant. Venus and Mars will be your ruling planets through life, and while you may experience an uphill struggle and have more clouds than sunshine during your earlier life, you should never despair, as you will always have a sprinkle of sunshine in the trail of every cloud. You never recognize defeat, owing to your persistency.

It is better, in comparing the natal charts of two people about to enter matrimony, if the complete data of both are given me. Miss V. A., born November 7, 1908, gives me the same information about her intended fiancé, but neglects the hour of birth for either. However, as far as I can judge, she and the young man might be happily married. But, Miss V., after what you tell me of his nationality, there might quite easily be a conflict of will between you two if he is typical of his race. You can be very stubborn and headstrong, and even—don't get mad at me—revengeful if sufficiently aroused. Yet beneath it you have a good heart. If you marry him write and let me know how it turns out, won't you?

Miss A. B.'s birthday occurred October 6, 1913, and now she is just at the age to begin to be uneasy about her love affairs. Up to the time she is twenty-five her serious affairs should be regular—that is, occur every two years! It's a fact, Miss A. When you get to be nineteen your aspects show that you should

experience a quite serious love affair; and if you don't marry him, then you should have other opportunities in your twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fifth years. You want a great deal from love—intellectual, spiritual and emotional union, too. Because of this, I should say that you might find your mate in a man older than yourself. But you will always have romance in your life.

A second marriage for D. M., born July 19, 1891, would be far happier than her first. She likes to be boss, and her prospects look good for finding a companion sufficiently good-natured to prove a perfect complement to her. She will always be fond of jewelry, dress and looking after her own personal appearance; and although she may be thought to be self-conscious and backward she is persistent enough to compensate.

Don't see any change of position for Miss D. B. W., born May 9, 1906. At least until the close of this year, and not until next year or 1933 are there changes in her emotional status. She is not the person to say no to romance, and as there are plenty of indications that love will come her way several times through life she *might* marry more than once. But unless she learns to let her head rule her heart more than it now does, she is going to have regrets. You are slow to anger, Miss D., but once your temper is aroused it's fierce! However, there's no revenge in your nature and you seldom mean all you say—all the people you have "killed" are still living!

"I have been under a doctor's care for two years. I should like to know if I will ever be well enough to earn my own living or get married." Miss H. M. G., born September 21, 1910, you should slowly but surely regain that health of yours within the next two years. Looks to me like nerves, which can be remedied a good deal through the mind, you know. You should eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, hot broths, lamb and sea food and poultry, but not fried foods, pork or beef.

There are several pursuits open to you, Miss G. M. H., born April 8, 1897, at 11.55 P.M. You have a versatile and practical nature, but no matter how practical, the domestic side of life does not appeal to you as does the wider scope of a chosen career. Certain traits in your character would enable you to take up nursing with success, if this appeals to you. Also anything strictly feminine, such as beauty work, feminine apparel or even interior decorating. You would seem to have sufficient business acumen to carry you far along these lines. You are apt to be cautious and mistrustful and at the same time persistent. You probably think yourself all nerves.

For location I would advise the West or Middle West, Mr. R. N., born September 19, 1886. And for the kind of work: electrician or machinist, engineer (mechanical or civil) or carpenter. You will always love the country, mountains or quiet places and are not a very good mixer. Perhaps this latter trait is the result of a keen faculty for summing up the average human—you should be able to read people like books.

Again we have a too general question. The general outlook for Miss J. S., born May 28, 1913, between 6 and 7 A.M., should be good beginning this summer. But she didn't ask me anything else, so that's all, Miss J.!

Your question has nothing to do with astrology, Miss W. M. E.

Letters as sincere as yours, Miss J. M., born March 10, 1906, make me feel like working overtime to give you every bit of help in my power. Your natal chart would seem to indicate that your best bet for a career would be in some business having to do with feminine wearing apparel—dressmaking, selling clothing, millinery, etc. You could also do well as a secretary or bookkeeper, although these might not give scope for your full capabilities. As a governess, also, you might be congenially placed.

For some years past you have had more clouds than sunshine in your life, but beginning this year your tide is due to turn. The next seven years should be important ones to you, perhaps the most romantic in your life.

If you must sell your rooming house, Miss A. A. J., born March 7, 1869, I would advise you to wait until next year if possible. If haste is essential, you would have more chance to sell during May, July or November than at other times. However, if you can hold on to it, I think you should get a better price in the spring of 1931.

Mrs. D. E. L., born January 5, 1907, should have a marriage blessed with more than one child. Your horoscope indicates fruitfulness, Mrs. L. Further, there is an indication that you might have more daughters than sons. Although you crave love and affection and the possession of children, you must realize that you are apt to demand jealous possession of those you love and this is unfair to developing childhood. Try instead to understand your children, and to help them by letting them find themselves, find their own individualities

without too much domineering on your part. You may not mean to do so; you are at heart sensitive and loyal to those who give you equal loyalty.

No to your question, Miss G. H. D., born January 20, 1895. No more for you this year. and it is just as well, as you would not better yourself by any change you made. You are a good business woman, and as extravagant as a Scotchman, or I miss my guess. You are also inclined to be somewhat old-fashioned in certain ways.

There is no sugar coating for your pill, Mrs. R. H., born December 29, 1904. Both questions you asked are negative. In fact, altogether you are under very bad vibrations emotionally just now, and I think that anything in the way of a love affair that occurs within the next two years will bring you only unhappiness. I do not see any indication of a reunion between yourself and your husband, and I doubt very much whether, in your secret heart, you really desire this. It looks to me as though this man is entirely the wrong partner for you, and if ever you came together, you would not remain reunited for long. That last remark applies also to the other man of whom you speak. Conditions for you are too upset to admit of any but a temporary emotional alliance. The thing for you to do is to concentrate on other interests in your life. And write me again when things take a turn for the better.

Mr. S. D. P., if you have been reading this column, you will know by now that I don't like such questions as yours. Any particular query, whose answer can be of service to you, by all means write and ask. As to your nature, you are apt to be firm with men, but weak with women. You should cultivate self-confidence, and the courage of your own convictions. Sometimes you may get an impression of too great independence, which alienates those about you. But this is only a surface mannerism. Underneath it you are modest and rather timid, yet with sufficient persistence to overcome these traits if you will. You consistently seek perfection, and are perennially disappointed when your idols are shattered. Hate medicine, don't you, and are not a very good water drinker.

It seems that you got your present position at a good time, Miss H. W., born August 18, 1909. Conditions would seem to indicate that it will be permanent and that you have a good chance for advancement, or promotion in the future. You have a sunny, open-hearted nature—nothing underhand about you—and you like to lead.

I don't think marriage is on the program for you at present, Miss A. M. T. You may have an encounter with romance this coming summer, but perhaps the most auspicious times for you should be 1933 and 1934. If you marry during either of these years, you would have a good chance of making the union successful. You are devoted to your mother.

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*If you desire Prof. Meyer to answer your question in a personal letter, you must inclose ten cents, U. S. POSTAGE to cover cost of mailing.*

# Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

*JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."*

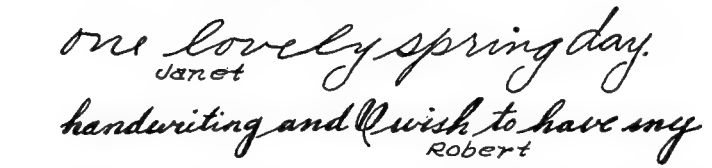
*You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.*

*Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.*

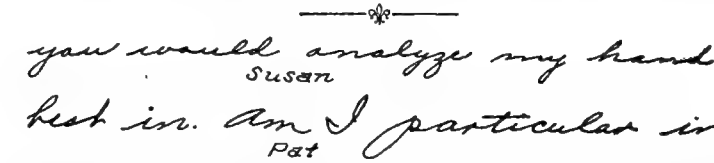
*As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.*

A LETTER from a little girl in far-away Alaska, which came to my desk this morning, gave me more of a thrill than the birthday presents which had reached me earlier in the day. By the way, I have just passed another milestone in the highway of life, which now makes me—twenty-one. Well, girls, if that doesn't tally exactly with my birth certificate, what's the difference? I don't feel any older than that anyway. My fair correspondent in Nome tells me that she eagerly awaits the arrival of ALL-STORY every other week, and she thinks this department "is simply great." Bessie's trouble seems to be an oversupply of male admirers. Who would have thought that hot-headed lovers abounded in such numbers in frigid Alaska? Be that as it may, Bessie's ambition is to get to Hollywood and make a name for herself in the "talkies." She says she doesn't care a hoot for men. She probes me with many questions as to what she should do, all of which I intend to answer in a private letter to her. No matter what part of this old world we go to, we find the same human emotions—love and ambition—striving for the mastery in the lives of young men and women. It has, and ever will be thus.

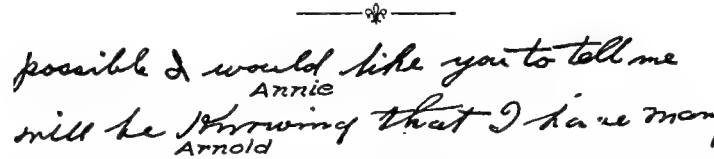
## SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS




(Miss Janet R., Los Angeles, Cal.) You impress me as being a girl with lots of go and vivacity. You would be the life of any party, and a continual cut-up wherever you went. I would call you a "step lively" girl, and if Robert is to measure up to you he will have to throw overboard a lot of his conservative mannerisms. You have picked a good boy as a sweetheart, Janet, but I'm sorry to say he is just the very opposite of you when it comes to virility. He is inclined to be heavy and ponderous, and somewhat parsimonious and careful with his money. You say you have seen evidence of this tightness in his spending of money. I'm convinced that he is a "tight-wad," and one who will never part with a dime unless it is necessary. On the other hand, you are liberal-hearted and even extravagant at times, which I'm sure is going to rub Robert the wrong way when you get married. There is such a vast difference between you in this respect I feel justified in dwelling on it here. Your other "weaknesses" are small compared to what I have just mentioned, so I would advise you to settle the disbursement of the family income, and who is to be the treasurer in your home, before you fix the date of your wedding.



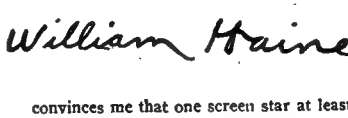

(Miss Susan McC., Hamilton, Ont.) Your sweetheart Pat has all the emotionalism of his nationality. He is extremely affectionate, as you very well know, and as honest as he is Irish. Of course, you are not far behind him yourself, Susan, when it comes to emotion. I think you are an exceptionally fine girl, with pure motives and a straightforward outlook on life. I'm afraid I can't tell you more than you know yourself about your fiancé. By the tone of your letter you have a pretty good "line" on him. Though he will never be a leader of men, at the same time he is an honest-to-goodness fellow who is out to do the best he can for you. You ought never to regret that you met Pat at that picnic last summer. And the same applies to him, for he has in you a genuine companion. I think the only thing that I would be doubtful about in your boy friend's disposition is his temper. It is quick and fiery, and as a result his words would have great punch to them when he was all "het up." As to your own weak points they don't amount to much, for apart from your desire to talk a little too much at times, there is nothing to hinder you from being the best little wife in Hamilton. I wish you both the best of luck.




(Miss Annie J., Cleveland, Ohio.) In studying your handwritings I am convinced you two young folk ought to make a "go" of matrimony all right. On the whole you are

# What Their Handwriting Tells

TO the layman who knows little about the significance of pen strokes with relation to human character, this handwriting would at once indicate that the brain which conceived these strokes and curves had a fixed purpose in life. The penmanship of "Bill" has always impressed me with the fact that he is a fellow with an objective. He has set his face toward success, and with the determination of a man of purpose, the devil himself is not going to stop him. And what is more important, Mr. Haines is climbing this ladder of fame on his own momentum. The simplicity and clarity which characterizes his pen movements



convinces me that one screen star at least in Hollywood is not depending on "pull" to get him to the top. His sharp, well-formed letters bespeak a critical mind and a deliberate daring. The steady glow of an ambitious disposition stares you in the face as you watch the firm ascending strides of the capital letters. These alone show power and punch. The emotional side of this young man's nature is well balanced. He possesses none of the sheik-like qualities of a Valentino, nor the romantic tendencies of a Barrymore, but in spite of this, "Bill" has all the persuasive power of a Romeo by the fact that he always gets his girl in the end. Which is another way of saying that "still waters run deep"!

THE pen strokes of this favorite artist show a depth of feeling and a breadth of outlook somewhat surprising in a girl who impresses her audiences with her vivacious, light-hearted youthfulness. No one who has followed Miss Gaynor through her screen successes, or who has listened to her easy-going speech could imagine that behind this seemingly carefree disposition there lies an acute and logical brain. She belongs to the type who must know the why and the wherefore of a proposition before she says "Yes." In other words, Janet is a practical-minded girl who expects a

square deal from those with whom she is associated; because she gives one, to the best of her ability. When it comes to sentiment and emotionalism these characteristics are not deep-rooted in her nature. I would call her a normal-minded girl where affection is concerned. I could never imagine Janet losing her head or getting insomnia over some sheik who happened to be in the cast of a production. External appearances mean little to this popular screen star. The mentality and principles of a man would mean more to her than his good looks or his bank account.

perfectly suited to each other, and have likes and dislikes pretty much the same. To tell the truth, Arnold has the more forceful character of the two, for after giving you full credit for being only a girl of nineteen there are some traits, Annie, in your nature which are rather weak and disappointing. For example, you are a rather moody individual who gets into the depths of despair without any real reason for being so. In other words, you are victim to the "blues" quite a lot, and as such those around you have a tough time humoring you. As far as Arnold is concerned, he is a very sentimental chap with steadfast affections. He not only means well, but he is doing well, and when he is your husband I am sure you will find him "all wool, and a yard wide." I see no reason why you should not be very happy in each other's companionship, if you will only remember to play the game of give and take. I foresee a happy marriage for you.

This is just a few lines
Bertha
much greater success
Joseph

(Miss Bertha B., Binghamton, N. Y.) I don't wonder that you have misunderstandings with your sweetheart. These little tiffs you speak of in your letter are the result of different temperaments. You impress me as a rather vain little girl who is never done bragging about her worldly possessions. You tell me that Joseph never seems to be interested in what you are doing or saying. I don't blame him, for none of us enjoy listening to an egoist—and that's just what you are. You belong to the class of people who never get away from their own petty troubles. You are too introspective and narrow-minded, Bertha, to be a really congenial companion to any man. I take my hat off to a man like Joseph. He has more patience than most men have with a young lady of your disposition. He is a man of the world, and likely to make a name for himself before he is many years older. If you two get married there will have to be some mighty plain talking done before the wedding day. My honest opinion is, you two are by no means suited to each other.

## YOUR CAREER

in any way that

(Miss Edna F., Detroit, Mich.) It is obvious to me that you are never happy unless you are on the move. You are a healthy-minded girl, with a lot of natural ability. I am astonished that you hesitate as to what you should do for a living, as you put it in your letter. You have the personality of one who would be a great success as a hostess in a fashionable restaurant or any other public place. Your enthusiastic disposition, coupled with that tendency to optimism which I see here and there in your pen strokes, all tell me that you would be an asset in such an establishment. Your winning smile and gracious mannerisms would be the means of building up for your employer a desirable clientele. Of course, I would not say that you have no shortcomings for such a position. You have, but they are minor discrepancies which with a little care you could overcome. For example, your memory for faces is rather weak at present. Your tendency to talk a little too much might also be a drawback to you. The want of proper self-control is another of your foibles which would have to be remedied before you could ever be an A number-one hostess. If you could master or improve those negative traits, you would be on the highway to success in this field of labor.

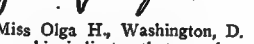
with a personal reply

(Miss Maggie L., Miami, Fla.) Your clean-cut pen strokes and your cultured style of writing leads me to think that your aesthetic tastes would enable you to fill an important position in some interior decorating organization. You evidently have an abundance of that creative power which is so essential to one in that business. You are also logical, with enough tact in your make-up to convince the most narrow-minded of matrons that your plan of campaign is the best in the world. No wonder that job of yours is worrying you. You are built for bigger things than to be filing letters in any office. Your imaginative powers are constantly seeking a wider environment than that which one finds in the average business office. What you lack most of all,

Maggie, is self-control. Don't be so impatient with those around you. They are doing their best, so don't get on to your high-horse so quickly the next time you want something done. Think over these things I have mentioned, and I'm sure you can improve your position a hundredfold by doing the work I have suggested above.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(Miss Isa B., Toronto, Ont.) Your ability to concentrate is rather unusual. You get down to the smallest details, and never seem to be happier than when you are scrutinizing and dissecting the different objects that pass your view. You are also a logical girl, having the faculty of reasoning out a problem, and doing it well. I would also call you prudent when it comes to the management of your own and other people's affairs. Like many of your sisters, you seem to favor the mystical and spiritual things in life. You are a thinker and a pretty deep one at that. In looking at your negative traits, I would place on the list your lack of patience. You are extremely high-strung and irritable. You have no use for those who have to sleep over their problems. It is snap judgment every time with you, and as far as jumping at conclusions is concerned, your decisions are formed in a jiffy. Then I see a tendency to quarrelsomeness, which is by no means a beautiful characteristic in any girl of your age. Moreover, you are thin-skinned when some one discusses your appearance or your mannerisms. You belong to the class of folk that are called "touchy," and sometimes hard to live with, owing to that fact. Though you have many commendable qualities, you have also many weak ones which would be all the better to be adjusted.



(Miss Olga H., Washington, D. C.) Your penmanship indicates that you have an affectionate nature and are fond of the opposite sex. You prefer the company of men to women any day. There is a certain bashfulness and reserve about you which is somewhat of a detriment to you. I'm afraid if you are to succeed in life you will require more aggressiveness and self-assertion. You are a little bit too passive just now. I observe that you are generous-hearted, and would be always ready and willing to do your share when it comes to helping a good cause. To a certain extent you are a mystic and a lover of the occult. From another angle, I see that you are not so concentrative as you might be. This may be due to the fact that your mind leaps quickly from one idea to another. You are blessed with imagination, but thank goodness you do not expend it in idle day-dreaming. Rather, your practical mind converts its visions into concrete and worthwhile achievements. I see many commendable traits in your nature with very few weaknesses.

**THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS**

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after June 14. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
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(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

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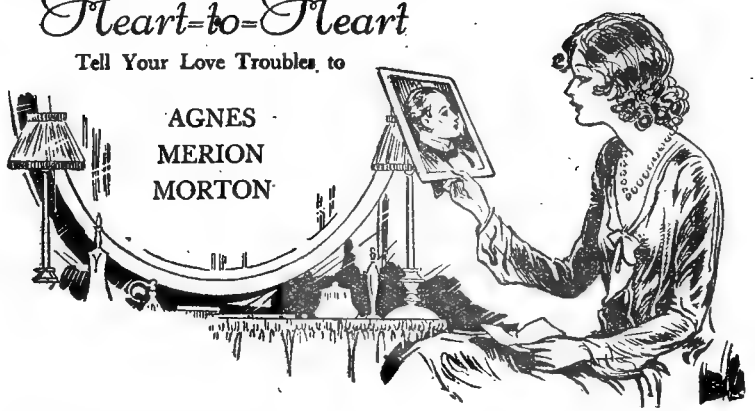
# Heart-to-Heart

**Tell Your Love Troubles to**




*MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.*

*Every letter is confidential.*

*As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.*

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I would like to have you advise me in my trouble. I was engaged to be married some time ago to a boy I love dearly. He told me he loved me and could not live without me. He wished me to marry him at the time and go against daddy's will, but I told him I was not ready yet. My darling mother is dead. We had been going together only a few months, but we loved each other from the first time we met. He had to go away because he lost his job, and he got another in Chicago, two hundred miles away, and he was to come back for me in September and we could be married then.

He wrote to me steadily two or three times a week until about two weeks ago. Then he wrote saying he was heartbroken but he wanted to break the engagement, but he wished I would keep his ring and a string of amethysts he gave me, for remembrance. He said daddy would never let us be happy together. He said I mustn't forget him, for he loved me very dearly, but I am so unhappy without him. Of course, I can't forget him. I have a good home and a good daddy, although it is true that he was never very nice to Frank. He doesn't want me to marry yet, if at all, and when I do he says I ought to get a different sort of man. I will soon be of age.

What shall I do? Sometimes I doubt if he loves me at all, if he could write me such a letter, but I don't know how I can ever get over loving him. What do you think, Mrs. Morton?

HOPELESSLY IN LOVE.

I am afraid, my dear, that this is just another instance of a girl's wasting her time and thoughts on a man who is unworthy. Of course, it is not exactly easy or pleasant to marry into a family where one is not entirely welcome, but he knew the situation about your father when you were first engaged to him. Nothing new has come up to put him off, on your side. If you were going to be married and go so far away, there would be no occasion for him to have any more disagreements with your father. I don't want to hurt your feelings, dear, but it sounds very much as if his love has grown cool since you parted. Whether that is due to some other girl being on the spot when you were two hundred miles off, really does not matter. If he loved you enough his love could survive the parting; and if it is not strong enough to live, it would be only a question of time even if you were married, how soon he would fail you.

As for "never getting over it," a great many girls have thought they couldn't and lived to look back and wonder at themselves for deigning to regret a man who could not keep his promise and be true. However hard it may be, it is not too late, as it would be if you had married him. Perhaps your father was right in his judgment of this young man, after all, and when you are older you will be willing to admit it, and you yourself will be a better judge of men because you have found this one out. As for keeping his ring, don't do it. Send it back with a cool and dignified little note, if you wish, and let him do a little of the wondering.

Read another woman's story:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am writing to you because I have absolutely no one else to go to. I hope you will send me your advice very soon, for I will be waiting for you to decide my future. Two years ago I married a man who was divorced. He had a wife and two children. He told me he had never loved her, but had been kept very strictly at home and thought he could have more freedom if he married, but later he saw his mistake. I asked him if there wasn't any chance he would go back to his wife again, but he said no. She had left him and taken the babies, and got her divorce, and he did not want her, nor she him. I'd been brought up to think it is not right to marry a divorced person, and I tried to break up, but couldn't.

We married and got along all right until this last winter. My mother was taken very ill and father sent for me to go home. I went and stayed and nursed her for three months and a half. Shortly after I got home I found I was going to have a baby, and I wrote and told my husband so and begged him to get some time off at the holidays and come to be with us, but he said he couldn't. At first, however, he wrote very affectionate and loving letters; then he stopped. Finally he wrote and said he had been out having a good time, but that he would try to settle down again if I would come back. I asked him for my car fare (it was nearly fifty dollars), but he said he did not have it; he had been spending a lot of money, and lost some gambling, and was in debt. So I got the money from my father and came back.

He said he had begun to run with the old crowd of fellows again and would like to go out with them one night a week, so I said all right, and then he began to stay out two or three nights a week, and would not come in until four or five in the morning, and sometimes not at all. Of course, I got suspicious, and finally he broke down and told me that his first wife had come back and that they had been staying together. He is helping to support her and their children, and he says he is in love with her now (he said "again," but he had told me many times before that he never loved her while they were married) and cannot help himself. I told him to think of our child that is coming, and tried to reason with him, but it did no good. He said he knows he is not doing right, but that he cannot help himself. This last week he has not been home at all.

I feel so helpless and don't know what to do. Do you think this is a punishment on me, Mrs. Morton, for marrying a man who was divorced? But I loved him so, and still do, in spite of everything. REBECCA.

Rebecca, there is a certain type of man who is constitutionally incapable of being true to women. In a way, they cannot help it; it is as if they had been born blind or maimed. In fact, that is just what they are—blind to the truth and beauty there is in life, crippled in lacking all moral sense. Woe betides the woman who puts her trust in such a one. I do not know whether this is a "punishment" on you, or not. We all make mistakes, and if you have made one you are the person who will have to suffer most for it, so I don't see why anybody else should sit back and say that you deserve it.

But now that things are in such a tangle, what shall we do? You have some one else to think of now besides yourself. You ought to have just as much peace of mind as possible in the next few weeks, and it seems to me that you would be better off to go home again and stay there until your baby is born. Then if your husband continues to fail you, you will have no choice but to divorce him. I always try to save a marriage if it is possible, but you can't make a success of it all by yourself. It takes two. And in this case, the man is already to blame for one broken home, and has other children for whom he is responsible. Perhaps the other woman feels she has as good a right as you to try to keep him, if she can. I am only sorry that either of you wants him! Such men simply *cannot* go straight, nor be honorable in their relations with women, and it is a pity that they are often endowed with qualities that make them lovable, when they are so weak and so unworthy of love. I hope that the little one who is coming will be a comfort to you, and repay you for all that it has cost.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been married a year and two months, and love my husband dearly. But what I have to write about is his folks. His father died a few weeks after we were married, and I came to the country to keep house for his mother, and now my husband thinks that we should not leave here. His folks are Italian and talk their own language all the time, and I cannot understand them, and it makes me so miserable. They can talk English if they try. My husband works from five o'clock in the evening to midnight, and when he is home it is all right, of course, but he has to sleep in

the daytime, and then they talk among themselves, and the same way every evening when he is away.

The only thing I can see to do is to leave. But every time I speak of it he gets so unhappy and even cries, and begs me to stay, and I feel as if I can't leave him just on account of his folks. Why should I? I have told him over and over, and then he will say, "There you go—the same thing over again," but I don't believe men ever understand how women feel, and how mean they can be to each other. Not that they are really disagreeable, but I think it is very cruel. He says he is not making money enough to live alone, but we lived on less than he gets now when we were alone when we were first married. Some of our friends make less than he does, too, and they get along all right. If he would only give me a chance for happiness. Dear friend, I hope you do not think me selfish, but don't you think I am right?

A FRIEND IN NEED.

No, I don't consider you selfish, but it surely would be a pity to part from your husband while you love each other, and for such a comparatively trivial reason. You do not tell us to just what extent he is responsible for his mother's support, but it would be hard indeed to get along if he had to give her money regularly.

Why don't you learn to talk Italian yourself? Have you ever thought of that? It would be hard for his mother, who is older, to give up her own tongue, but I don't see any reason why an intelligent young woman could not learn to speak another language. It is a wonderful thing to know more than one; Italian is particularly beautiful, and you would have an exceptional opportunity to study and practice it in a house where it is continually spoken. Since you get on all right with your mother-in-law otherwise, I'm sure she would be glad to help you if you showed an interest. Your husband would help you, too. Why don't you go at it the way a child does, learning the names for things first, and then gradually trying to put sentences together? A simple book or two would help also, of course. The knowledge would never come amiss; the time might even come when you would be very thankful you had acquired it. It's too bad, you know, to stop learning just because we've left school. Take this chance that fate is offering you, and turn it into something constructive instead of wasting your time in worrying and repining. Show them you aren't going to be left out, and that you can do something better to cope with the situation than run away from it.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I would like a little of your advice. I have been reading ALL-STORY, which is of much interest to me, and I want to relate my experience to you. I am a teacher, nineteen years old. (In this State all you have to do to be a teacher is be nineteen years old.) Last year I fell in love with a boy sixteen, now seventeen. He devoted his entire time to me and said many times he loved me more than words could tell. I believed him, and do yet. He always did all he could for me, took me places, brought me candy, etc. I told him I also loved him, and he wanted to get me a diamond ring, but I insisted on his waiting until he was older, so as to be more sure. We always got along very well together, hardly ever quarrelled. He came to see me one night, brought me a box of candy as usual, but never after that night did he write or come. His mother is dead, and he lives alone with his father, who was perfectly satisfied that he went with me.

I didn't see him for some months, and then I met him at a friend's house where we both were invited to play cards. He has my picture, which he had promised to give back if we ever parted, and I asked him for it, but he said he wanted it. Then I heard that he had been showing some of my letters, and the next time I saw him I asked him about that, and he said he had done it because he'd heard I was showing his. I still think a lot of him, but don't think he has done right. I even wrote and asked him what was the trouble—why he quit, I mean—but I was unanswered. Now he is taking another girl to shows and things.

I have been going with another boy since he quit, and he said he loved me, but another girl he is going with won't let him quit her cold. He also promised me his picture in return for mine, but I didn't get it. I think I could be happy with him, or with either of them, but far happier with the last one. He is a farmer, and about twenty-one. My people do not like him; they say he is "wild." They do like the first one, though. I live in the country and teach school, and I have other boy friends, but it seems as if the ones I love the best drift away from me. I always think it is some one else's fault. Please don't think my letter foolish, but tell me your opinion of it all. I am sorry now I didn't take the ring when I had the chance. Did I do right in not taking it? Should I speak to either of them when I see them, or not?

ELISE.

Elise, Elise, why will you take the remarks of ungrown youths so seriously? You certainly did right in not taking the ring. No boy of seventeen should be held accountable for what he says. I wish I could teach you girls to be clever with men—some seem to know how without teaching, and the rest refuse to learn. Did you ever see a baby with a toy, Elise? He grabs for it, and it holds his attention for just about three minutes, and then he throws it away and reaches for something else. That is the way boys are—their interest

is not held very long by something they have *got*. The only way to hold them is to keep them guessing—to dangle the toy just a little out of reach, and make them strive to get it. I'm afraid—and I do not say this to hurt you, but to help you—that you have been too easy to "get." Why do you hold yourself so cheap? Why, for instance, be so ready to give your picture first to this one, then to that one?

The first boy is only a callow youth, not grown-up either physically or mentally. I have no doubt he meant what he said while he was saying it, but "a boy's will is the wind's will," and it changes just as often. Why not? He isn't old enough to settle down to the business of living yet. He isn't even old enough to know that *men* don't "show" a girl's letters. It is a shame for any young fellow to marry before he is well past twenty-two, at the very least. He has to know more than one girl before he can tell what sort will suit him.

The second boy does not sound like the kind you can depend on, either; certainly he is not the kind you should have made so sure of you. There is no reason why you should not "speak" to either of them when you meet by accident. It is childish to show resentment. But, on the other hand, don't gush. Be cheerful, businesslike, and casual.

Suppose you try to perfect yourself in your profession for a while, to learn all the things you must be ignorant of if you began to teach at such an early age; and for your recreation, go out and have a good time at shows and card parties and dances, but don't be so ready to believe all you're told, and, even if you do believe it, don't give yourself away. The sophisticated woman, the clever woman, always, like the Northwest Mounted Police, "gets her man," but she does it mainly by not letting him know that she thinks he's worth getting. See, Elise?

## *Reader's Choice Coupon*

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free any original illustration in this issue. Just tell us which you liked best and inclose five coupons in your letter and the drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Gallant Girl .....

Love Wears a Mask.....

Little Brown Toad.....

The Daring of Love.....

The Loyal Heart.....

Daphne Learns How.....

His Hired Fiancée.....

Jockeying for Love.....

His Princess of Blushes.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

*(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)*

# The Lonesome Club

## Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

*MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.*

*Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of* ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

*If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.*

*If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.*

*Please do not ask for the address of any one.*

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I like ALL-STORY so much that I can hardly wait until the new edition comes out. The stories aren't all based on the same plots, like the rest of the love story magazines. I also like your Lonesome Club, and I hope you can get me a few pals. I'm a girl of nineteen, tall, with dark hair and eyes—never mind the looks. I can get by. Have been married for six months, but am lonesome as my husband isn't home much. I love to dance, swim, etc., and love my good times, also play the piano when I'm in the mood. That's about all I can say about myself, and I hope that you'll help find many pals for me. I promise to exchange snapshots and answer all letters promptly.

BEBE OF JERSEY.

Eighteen years, of Buffalo, have blue eyes and golden hair (curly); am five feet three and weigh one hundred and fifteen. Come, and please write, so I will not be lonesome.

LUCILLE OF BUFFALO.

I get very lonesome at times and don't know what to do with myself. I love to have many friends to write to, so I hope you will help me. Oh, do hurry, friends. I love to answer letters. I am eighteen, have brown hair and big brown eyes. I hope looks don't matter much. I am five feet three and weigh one hundred and ten. I love all kinds of sports and like to read books. So come, pals, write to a lonely girl. I'll exchange snapshots, too.

HELEN OF MASS.

I am nineteen, have light hair, blue eyes, five feet eight, weigh one hundred and forty. I have two cauliflower ears I received while wrestling, also a broken nose I received swimming. Nevertheless, I am considered good-looking, and to the pal who writes to me I will send a photograph proving it. I like to dance, swim, play tennis, and if you print this letter I'll turn three handsprings and a somersault. My nickname is

NICK.

I think that it is wonderful, this department of yours. And I sure do need a good pen pal, one from a Western State, whom I hope to meet some day. For I am going to travel in that direction before I'm much older. Just picture me out. I'm five feet four, weigh one hundred and thirty—just a good size. Hair is dark, eyes hazel and full of mischief and pranks. Am fair, and not considered bad-looking. Am only twenty-two. I have a good number of friends, but that isn't enough, for nobody can have too many friends. I love

to dance anyway, any time, anywhere—that's me. I also love to skate, swim, play basketball, tennis or any other kind of sports, and am crazy about playing cards. I also take my little uke with me everywhere I go, especially when out riding. Now if anybody has time to write and really wants a real pal, just rush the mailman to my house and I will hold him and rush a letter back. I know you won't regret it after you get to knowing me, for I can always cheer you up. Waiting patiently for an exciting friend.

BEST GEM OF OHIO.

A Canadian girl sixteen years old. Five feet four, with short, dark brown hair, dark gray eyes and weigh one hundred and twenty-eight. I am especially interested in sports such as basketball and ice skating.

RAE.

If pleading makes people write to any one, here goes. I'm just sixteen, red brown hair, blue Irish eyes, round baby face, and am five feet three and three-quarter inches. Have been abroad once—in fact, I was I born in England. Just got back here last summer. Been to New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Montreal and other places. Let curiosity overcome you to find out these other places. Can dance, sing, try to swim, drive a car, and so on. Promise to answer all letters.

PEGGY OF DETROIT.

I'd like a few pen pals among your lonely readers. I'm forty-five, six feet, weigh one hundred and sixty-five, fair complexion, agreeable and full of life. Live in a small town, have a nice home, but am lonely. All letters answered from people near my age. Those who wish a real live correspondent drop me a line. You will receive a surprise.

EDWIN H. OF TEXAS.

Have you a tiny space in your corner for me? I'm twenty years old, a brunette, and have dark brown eyes. I am five feet three. I work at home in our store and get lonesome at times, and would love to have some pen pals. I'm fond of sports, especially dancing and reading. I would like to hear from all over—anywhere suits me.

ANN FROM ILLINOIS.

I keep up ten correspondents now, but feel as though I'd like new friends. I work in the post office here, and therefore the letters will be taken care of as soon as they are dumped from the pouches. You see, there is no danger of any getting lost! I am twenty, weigh one hundred and twenty-five, have brown hair, gray eyes, and am a high school graduate. Have held the present position for almost two years. I am anxious to tell those who write of our wonderful country 'way up in northern Michigan, of its wealthy copper mines, lakes, and scenery. I have a growing bob, wear glasses, and by some people am considered good-looking, although I never admit it myself. I feel as though I still need improvement. I love music, dancing, sewing and cooking. Any sports are also enjoyed, especially snowshoeing. So come on, folks, I'm waiting.

SNOWBOUND.

A girl of seventeen looking for pen pals between sixteen and twenty. I am five feet five, with fair hair and blue eyes. My hobbies are swimming, skating and dancing.

SNAPPY FLO.

I am a girl of fifteen, five feet five and considered good-looking. I have loads of friends, but they all live too near to communicate with by mail and I do love to write and receive letters. So won't some one please write me "pronto." I promise to answer all letters and to exchange snaps. I would especially like to hear from pen pals interested in art.

RONNY OF CHICAGO.

I'd like to make a lot of friends and pals. I am in the United States Army, nineteen years old, five feet six, dark hair, brown eyes, medium complexion, and lots of ambition. Would like to receive lots of letters, and will answer all promptly. Everybody's welcome, including Mr. and Mrs. Wishing the magazine lots of luck.

PRIVATE ROD.

Two lonely sisters living on a ranch in the far West. Have plenty of good times and friends, but crave pen pals. Ages—eighteen and twenty—both considered fairly good-looking. Love all kinds of sports, swimming and horseback riding especially. Enjoy dancing also. Won't some one write to us?

TWO IDAHO SPUDS.

I'm hoping you will find some new friends for me. I am Jewish, five feet five, eighteen years old, have brown hair and brown eyes. I am fond of reading, dancing, driving auto, and playing tennis. I have friends who are selfish and I find I cannot get along with them.

LILLIAN OF CHICAGO.

I'm looking for pen pals between fifteen and twenty. I have fair hair and blue eyes and am five feet four. My hobbies are swimming, dancing, and reading.

PEPPY DOT.

I think the Lonesome Club is a plenty hot idea; I like to read the letters of the young girls in their teens, that are peppy and have lots of life in their letters, best. I am five feet two, eyes of blue, dark golden hair that is curly, and I weigh one hundred and eight. Sophomore in high. I love to dance and swim, play tennis and basketball. I'm always looking for a good time. Everybody that is full of pep please write to

PATSY OF NORTH DAKOTA.

Here I am, just dying to hear from people all over the world, and as I know your magazine is world famous I expect letters from far and wide. I am twenty-seven years old, work in a Canadian railway office. I've been work-

ing for ten years, and would love to receive letters from people in business surroundings as well as all other walks of life, so come on now, you epistle-writing lovers, bring out the writing fluid and get busy. I will send to those interested booklets on our wonderful country, and will exchange snaps. I am not so bad-looking, either—at least, that's what my acquaintances say. Well, here's hoping for a deluge—of mail.

RAILWAY GIRL.

P. S. Have oceans of time to answer all letters, and lots to talk about.

I am a young married woman of sixteen, and do want pen pals. I will write to anybody, girls or married women all over the world. I am four feet eleven, weigh one hundred and twenty-six, and am fairly good-looking. I like all kinds of outdoor sports, so would like somebody who likes outdoor games or anybody who has life and pep to answer this letter.

TOMBOY.

I am writing to you to get me a pen pal. I am in the eighth grade of school. My age is thirteen. I am wishing you success in getting me a pen pal in a different city.

CAROLYN OF INDIANA.

I am, oh, so lonesome. Just a little blonde five feet three, eighteen, blue eyes, and weigh one hundred and fourteen. I am very fond of dancing, music, books and all sports. Anxious to exchange snapshots. Aw, come on, write me!

TRIX.

A lonely girl who lives on a ranch close to the State capital of Idaho. It is an out-of-the-way place and due to the fact that I have to care for an old invalid lady, I have to stay home a lot. So come on, girls, all of you, and write to a lonely girl. I am almost twenty-three. Have Irish-blue eyes and a very light tint of auburn hair. Yes, girls, I'm Irish. I like pretty scenery and good clean sports of all kinds. Although I have never danced I think it is all right, if one stays in their place. I especially like hiking, fishing and swimming. My folks say I should have been a boy—ha! Expect to get some real old pen pals soon.

BLUE EYES.

I've been regular reader of ALL STORY for some time, and would like to have this letter printed as I'm looking forward to a lot of pen pals. Please help me out. I'm a boy of twenty-five, dark brown hair and eyes, and have done a bit of traveling. I can tell aplenty about the South Sea Islands and other parts of the United States of America. I am a soldier stationed in Hawaii, and will send the first fifteen pals that write to me a bunch of colored views of the beautiful scenery.

HENRY OF THE ENGINEERS.

Another girl lonesome in the big city. Blond mamma, blue eyes, five feet four, weigh one hundred and twenty. My sport is especially dancing. Now, pals, shake the rust off those pens and write. I'm eighteen. Will answer every letter received. Start! Go! Get ready!

CITY GIRL.

May I express my appreciation of the stories in your magazine? They are worthy. And here is hoping that I can join the Lonesome Club. I am twenty-four, like all sports, and have a big surprise for the first twenty-five letters. So you pals hunting for a real thrill, c'm'ere. I am a moving picture operator and am called the "Writing Demon." I also hold a nice record of corresponding with unknown pals.

J. M. OF TEXAS.

A brunette of sweet sixteen, five feet four, one hundred and twenty-five in weight, blue eyes, fair complexion, and love all sports. I live in a small town and am feeling very lonesome, so would like to have loads of pen pals. I have several now, but would like to make more in every direction, every part of the earth. I will answer all letters promptly and will exchange pictures with any one who wishes them.

CALIFORNIA SUNSHINE.

Hello, pals! Here's a girl that is just full of pep and would love to have pen pals from all parts of the United States. I'm not handsome, but would pass in a crowd. Have dark brown curly hair and a pair of big brown eyes. Five feet three, weigh one hundred and four. Love all sports, also crave music. My hobby is writing to pen pals. Come on, girls! Pep, if you haven't—well, we'll eat it for breakfast. Let's see how many letters you can write me. I'll exchange snapshots.

BILLY.

This is Bob speaking. Am I lonesome for pen pals? Words couldn't express the feeling. I am five feet four, twenty-three years of age, am considered very good-looking, have a pleasing personality, and girls don't mean a thing in my young life. Not a thing. I am a good tap dancer, swimmer, golf player, tennis player, and an all-around athlete. So please, all who are interested in a dark-haired, blue-eyed boy friend, please write. Will exchange snapshots.

BOB OF MICHIGAN.

I am interested in the Lonesome Club and would like to join. May I? I am a girl sixteen years old, five feet two, with black curly hair and dark brown eyes. I like to raise whoopee, and how! I am keen on dances and many other sports. I am a happy-go-lucky lil girl looking for pen pals, so come on, girls, shake a leg and write to me. I'll answer all your letters.

BROWN EYES OF MINNESOTA.

I am very interested in your pal club, and would like very much to join. I am a girl of sixteen, with brown eyes and light brown wavy hair. I am five feet five, and considered quite pretty. I love dancing and picture shows. Would like to get letters from all over the world, so come on, boys and girls, fill my mail box, for I promise to answer them as fast as they come.

SUE.